Modern Day Cain

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Modern Day Cain

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Summary

Hannibal catches the exact moment when Will's eyes widen.

"Hannibal, your 7 o'clock," he whispers, leaning across the table to close the short distance between them. "Unwanted company."

Hannibal meets his partner's eyes under his boater hat and gives a nod, so slight that only Will would notice. He waits a minute, eats another mouthful of his meal, then looks to his left, lifting an arm as if to brush a speck of dust off his shoulder. What he's really doing is covertly glancing at the man loitering at the souvenir stand in the street behind them.

Hello! We are finally back with the sequel. Hannibal and Will have managed to escape to Cuba after wreaking havoc in Florence. But unfortunately, trouble follows them, in the form of Mason Verger seeking revenge for his disfigured face. Can our beloved Murder Husbands successfully beat this new threat, while navigating their evolving relationship?

Notes

We recommend that you read the prequel fic(s) before delving into this one, it will make following the plot much easier.

Chapter 1

Hannibal catches the exact moment when Will's eyes widen.

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Medium height and build, brown hair, and the posture of someone who regards himself as more important than he really is, and certainly more important than those around him. It's unmistakable — Dr. Frederick Chilton.

What is this self-absorbed disaster of a psychiatrist doing in Cuba? Hannibal doesn't know. He looks to Will and raises an eyebrow. Will stares back at him with an equally puzzled expression.

There has been no news of Frederick in months, not since Hannibal and Will had left the United States for Italy, then relocated to Cuba under false names. They keep tabs on their former friends and acquaintances via Google alerts, as well as monitor the manhunt led by Jack Crawford.

After Hannibal and Will left Florence with a loud declaration of their love and violence, Jack wisened up about Hannibal moonlighting as the Chesapeake Ripper. He also accepted Will's involvement in the carnage left behind in Italy, and wasted no time plastering both their faces onto the international wanted lists.

Of course, by the time Jack did so, Hannibal and Will had been lounging in their new house under the Cuban sun, pleasantly settled into their new identities. Hannibal wasn't concerned

about Jack finding them, but he always liked to be prepared. Thus, the casual monitoring of their status as fugitives and the activities of their former acquaintances.

It has been a while since his iPad dinged with a relevant alert, and even longer since that alert had concerned Frederick Chilton. Hannibal searches through the specific room in his memory palace dedicated to the man, a small broom closet, and pulls out the most recent piece of news about him.

A teaser about a new book Frederick was writing. Hannibal smirks as he remembers reading the small excerpt, explaining the catchy title: *Fatal Attraction — The story of Hannibal the Cannibal and his lethal seduction of an unstable but gifted former FBI Agent.*

Ah yes, he remembers now. He had chuckled at the title but resolved not to tell Will about it yet. He would wait for the actual book to come out, then surprise Will with it for Christmas.

The only reason why Hannibal could guess Chilton is in Cuba is that the man had finally published his book and used the money to go on vacation.

Hannibal smirks again and pats Will's hand, communicating that Chilton's presence on their island was a cosmic coincidence and that he would explain later. Will shrugs but nods, trusting Hannibal.

Hannibal's heart swells with the casual display of trust. He had worked hard to earn that trust, and now his heart leaps with joy every time he is reminded of it.

Will leans across the table and reaches out a hand to lower the brim of Hannibal's hat, bringing their faces close enough for a sweet kiss. Hannibal pours love into it, the knowledge that Will is kissing him for the strategic purpose of hiding them from Frederick Chilton as he strolls past their table only making Hannibal feel more in love. If that's possible, anymore.

Will pulls back and grins. "Public displays of affection make people uncomfortable."

Hannibal matches his grin. “Let’s continue, shall we?”

He sets down a sizable stack of bills to pay their dinner fee, stands, and holds out his hand. Will takes it as he stands as well, and then the two of them are casually walking down the busy Cuban street, hand-in-hand, stalking their former acquaintance.

Dr. Chilton makes his way to a hotel a few blocks away. Only a *four* star establishment, Hannibal notes. Clearly, the book didn’t sell as well as expected. Before the man goes inside, he steps towards a small fruit stand off to the side of the hotel entrance. It’s evening, and if Chilton has just been out for dinner like Hannibal and Will, it makes sense that he would stop for a little dessert. Hannibal chuckles to himself, remembering how the last dessert dish he fed Dr. Chilton was blood pudding.

Will pulls him over to the same side of the street as Chilton, to linger without drawing attention to themselves. He pretends to admire a scarf while Hannibal fiddles with some jewelry, both discreetly looking at Chilton out of the corners of their eyes.

The psychiatrist-turned-author is haggling over an orange, which is just the ridiculous thing Hannibal expects of him. He’s found all the fruit here to be of much higher quality than whatever was available back in Baltimore, simply because they are in the tropics.

Dr. Chilton is now gesticulating with his hands and growing more impatient; the fruit seller is looking a tad confused about why this American tourist is haggling with him over the price of an orange, but sticks to his price just the same.

Suddenly, Chilton throws his arm out too wide and knocks the top-most orange off the pile. It lands on the pavement and rolls down the street, almost dangerous in its speed.

The orange comes to a stop after bouncing off Hannibal’s shoes, and Hannibal looks up.

Dr. Chilton stares at the fallen fruit before slowly dragging wide eyes up Hannibal’s frame. They grow wider the higher they go, until they meet Hannibal’s own dark eyes and Chilton gasps.

Hannibal squeezes Will's hand tightly in his own. There was horrified recognition in those eyes, and their leisurely desire to stalk Dr. Chilton has just turned into something much more serious.

Chilton spins around and almost runs into his hotel, ignoring the fruit seller's annoyed yelling as he rushes past. Hannibal's sharp eyes follow him into the building, catching sight of the panicked look Chilton throws over his shoulder the second before he disappears inside.

"Fuck," Will curses.

Hannibal nods grimly.

Breaking into Chilton's hotel room is a piece of cake. Hannibal distracts the receptionist with his charismatic persona, while Will's quick fingers pinch one of the master key cards from behind the desk. After that, it's simply a matter of finding out which room Chilton resides in, and sneaking inside after the man leaves the room to visit the hotel bar.

"Do you think he's already alerted the FBI?" Will asks, pacing around the dark room.

"I doubt it," Hannibal reassures him. "The FBI are offering sizable monetary incentives for any leads regarding our whereabouts. Our dear friend Dr. Chilton is going to try to obtain substantial proof before going to the authorities to ensure that he gets his paycheck."

Will snorts. "He's always valued fame and fortune over morality. It doesn't make him less of a threat."

Hannibal walks over to lay a hand on Will's shoulder, stilling his movements. "How would you like to deal with this threat?"

“How would *you*?” Will grumbles, but rests his head on Hannibal’s chest. “We make joint decisions now, Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiles. He’s pleased that Will is more concerned with their decision-making process than the decision itself. It shows that his beloved really doesn’t care for Chilton at all. Or maybe it shows how much he cares for Hannibal.

Either way, Hannibal is happy.

“We could kill him easily,” Hannibal replies. “However, there is something appealing about leaving dear Frederick to live in constant fear.”

Will laughs into his chest. “Always looking over his shoulder? If we were anyone else, the prospect of letting him live would be seen as mercy.”

“If we were anyone else, it would be,“ Hannibal says softly.

“I suppose we can simply surprise him in this room, have a civil chat, share a drink or two. Make him a deal; we won’t touch him if he doesn’t tell anyone about us,” Will suggests.

“Sounds like a great plan, darling.”

Dr. Chilton returns to the hotel room accompanied by a pronounced smell of liquor. Although not yet stumbling, he’s intoxicated enough not to notice Will and Hannibal waiting in the shadows of the lounge room. As the man flips the lightswitch and the ceiling lamp illuminates the figures of his two guests, his mouth opens in a silent gasp.

“Good evening, Frederick,” Will greets, lounging on one of the pristine armchairs in the corner, feet demonstratively lifted to rest on the coffee table. “We’d offer you a drink, but it smells like you’ve already had plenty.”

Chilton’s eyes widen in fear and he braces himself on the wall as he takes a step back towards the door.

“What do you want?” he chokes out, struggling to keep his tone even.

“To continue living our lives undisturbed,” Hannibal speaks, his voice the complete opposite to Chilton’s, calm and unbothered. “But unfortunately, us catching each other’s eye earlier this afternoon has necessitated a direct meeting.”

“If you leave now, I won’t call the police,” Chilton says, eyes nervously darting between Will and Hannibal, as if expecting either of them to attack the next second.

“We’re not concerned about the police,” Will laughs, rising to his feet.

Alerted by the movement, Chilton instinctively takes another step back, startling when his back meets the wall. Hannibal watches the man’s plight with an amused smile on his face. It’s enthralling to see Will, *his Will,* elicit such fearful responses from their former acquaintance with his mere presence.

“I’m sure that you would go to great lengths to ensure your survival, wouldn’t you, Frederick?” Hannibal asks.

Chilton nods rapidly. His eyes survey the room for potential weapons should he need to defend himself, but of course, Will and Hannibal made sure to remove all such objects out of reach long before he entered the room. Even if he managed to find something, it would be useless. Hannibal and Will are experienced killers; Chilton is no more than a frightened wannabe-author.

“So would we. As such, I think we have an opportunity to turn this situation to our mutual benefit,” Hannibal continues, stifling the urge to chuckle at Chilton’s anxious face.

Will, however, values polite manners less than Hannibal, and lets his mouth stretch into a victorious smirk, showing a hint of vicious teeth, as he looks at Chilton in his predicament. Will takes another few steps towards the man, and Chilton swallows uncomfortably. He glances back at Hannibal, as if he’s somehow less menacing out of the two of them. An interesting choice on dear Frederick’s part, considering that he’s aware of Hannibal’s history of spreading murder and terror across America and Europe, and approaching triple digits in his kill count.

“I’m eager to hear your proposition, Dr. Lecter,” Chilton replies with a hint of something that sounds like hope in his voice.

Perhaps the man thinks of Hannibal as the more reasonable one, harmlessly sitting in his chair and talking about a peaceful resolution, compared to Will, who is casually but surely advancing on Chilton.

“Let’s put it this way; you forget that you saw us here in Cuba, and in return, we won’t harm you,” Will states. Chilton’s eyes snap back to him.

“Sounds like a great arrangement,” he agrees, a visible drop of sweat rolling down the side of his forehead, “I won’t say a word to the authorities, let me assure you.”

“Rest assured, Frederick, we will know if you do,” Hannibal hums, finally standing from his chair.

“And at that point, there won’t be a place on Earth that you can hide that we won’t find you,” Will adds menacingly.

Chilton gulps. “I-I understand.”

Will steps closer to get right into the man's space, and pats him on the shoulder. Chilton squeezes his eyes shut, sweat trickling down his face, and Will laughs. Hannibal's breath catches.

"Goodnight, Frederick."

Chilton stammers out a goodnight, and then Will slams his head against the wall, catching his limp body as he immediately blacks out. Hannibal waits until Will has situated Chilton's body on the bed, then walks forward with quick, measured steps and catches Will's mouth in a bruising kiss.

"You are a beautiful, ruthless thing," Hannibal gasps when Will pulls away to mouth at his neck. He feels the vibrations of Will chuckling into his skin.

"Shouldn't you be used to it by now?" he wonders. "We've killed together for months now, but every time I show even slight violence you quiver like it's the first time."

Hannibal exhales and brings his hands up to run his fingers through Will's hair, tilting his head back to lock eyes.

"Can you truthfully say that you don't feel the same, each time I hurt someone?" he inquires softly.

Will's eyes flash and he swallows.

"No," he says, arousal settling into their shared gaze. "I can't."

Hannibal smiles and untangles their bodies. "Come. Let's go home."

Will reaches for his hand and together they quietly exit the hotel room.

“H-how much wood would a woodchucker chuckle -”

“Not quite, Professor Sogliato,” Hannibal’s chastising voice interrupts the man’s stuttering. “You stumbled over the words. Try again.”

Sogliato pinches his eyes shut and swallows.

“How much wood would a woodchuck chuck,” he recites shakily, “if a woodchuck could chuck wood?”

“That’s better. Though, your English pronunciation is, well…”

“... Appalling,” Will chimes in, grinning darkly. “You’ve got to put more twang in it. And speed it up. It’s a tongue twister, not a prayer.”

Sogliato turns to look at him, the look in his eyes somewhere between fearful and pleading.

“As you just heard, our native English speaker has deemed your efforts unsatisfactory. Say it again, please.” Hannibal’s unfaltering politeness is sickly-sweet and cuts deep like a gutting knife.

“Please, just — ” Sogliato protests weakly, squirming in his chair.

“Please what?” Will cuts him off, waving around the glass of wine he’s holding. “Of all people, you would know how satisfying it is to make fun of someone speaking a language that isn’t their first.”

They watch as the realization dawns on the poor man as he recalls all the times he's pointed out the tiniest imperfections in Hannibal's Italian pronunciation and mocked him for it, while they worked at the Palazzo together. Sogliato even went as far as ridiculing and embarrassing Hannibal in front of his friends and colleagues at the opera one day. Will wanted to kill him in that moment but, as it turns out, a meticulously planned-out revenge plot is more gratifying than immediate retaliation would've been.

Now, they are sitting in Sogliato's kitchen, paying him an impromptu visit. As predicted, the man has not been a willing host, but decided to cooperate after realizing that it was them who killed Antony Dimmond. And he's become even more cooperative after Hannibal and Will tied him to one of his fancy dining room chairs at knifepoint.

Despite Sogliato's blubbering, Will and Hannibal help themselves to some wine as they prepare to rid the world of his rudeness forever.

"Doctor Lecter, allow me to apologize," the man gasps, glancing up to Hannibal, clearly in hopes to make amends and persuade Will and Hannibal to leave his house without hurting him.

Unfortunately for Sogliato, Hannibal is not so amenable. He has been planning this moment in the back of his mind for days, and is relishing the chance to live it.

"Your apology would please me, but there are certain other things that would please me significantly more," Hannibal responds vaguely, with a predatory glint visible just beneath the surface of his amber eyes.

Sogliato's pupils widen at the words. He watches Will nonchalantly get up and fill his and Hannibal's glasses with more pinot noir. He makes a point not to pour any more into Sogliato's glass, indirectly telling the man that his time is almost up.

"Let's try again, shall we?" Hannibal suggests, nudging Sogliato's shoulder. The man twitches in terror.

Will chuckles. "Don't play with your food, Hannibal."

Hannibal meets his playfully dark eyes with his own. "Apologies, my dear."

"Normally I wouldn't care and even join you in messing with the prey, this one especially deserves it, but we can't miss our flight," Will responds.

Hannibal nods, knowing Will is correct. His eyes fixate on Sogliato again and he is reminded of the timetable they must keep to stay ahead of the authorities. This visit was a final farewell to tie up the loose ends, and teach an important lesson to his rude colleague.

"Yes, yes, leave now, I promise I won't tell anyone you were here," Sogliato pleads, eyes wide as sweat drips down his cheek.

Will snorts and Hannibal tilts his head.

"Your lesson is not quite finished," Hannibal murmurs as he wordlessly takes the knife Will holds out to him. "Generally, consequences are given for failure."

Sogliato stares at the knife as his breath quickens into a pant. "No, please, dottore *—"*

Hannibal ignores his irritating begging and lashes out with the knife in one smooth motion, cutting Sogliato's throat cleanly and deeply.

Will stands behind the man and grips his hair, making sure the blood flows over his nice clothes, down the wood of the chair, and seeps into the fibers of the rope holding Sogliato and the carpet underneath him. Hannibal flicks the red drops off his blade and stares as Will, the image of him holding Sogliato's head as his throat gushes blood a truly magnificent one.

Once the blood stops pumping out of Sogliato's dead body, Will releases him and turns away from the table, towards the large window. The view showcases the most beautiful parts of the

city, with the Florence Cathedral standing tall and proud among the sea of smaller but nonetheless ornate buildings.

Later, at the airport, Will buys a postcard with the same view. When Hannibal asks who he intends to send it to, Will shakes his head. He explains that he wants a souvenir to remember their adventures in Italy by; something to commemorate their first kills together.

It becomes a habit, an unwritten rule, to buy a postcard every time they add another name to their shared kill count. Will likes collecting the postcards and displaying them in their house, and Hannibal likes sending an identical copy to Jack Crawford, from an undisclosed, new location every time. He enjoys mocking Jack, and he enjoys sharing the hunt with Will. There are several postcards in their collection now, stuck to the wall in the lounge room.

Hannibal loves the compact little house they have in Cuba. It's much less spacious than the mansion he had in Baltimore, but it's a home he shares with Will, and he couldn't be happier. They shared an apartment in Florence before this, but it didn't feel the same. Back then they were still working on the foundations of their relationship, held back by mutual lies, manipulation, and doubts about each other. With that chapter now closed behind them, living with Will has become a whole new kind of bliss.

It was their joint decision to find a house by the sea. It means Will can fish easily, and Hannibal can fall asleep to the rhythmic sounds of waves hitting the rocky shore, which he loves. Sometimes they take their boat out into the open waters for days at a time — the boat Hannibal bought Will for his birthday not long ago, which he slyly decided to name *Mars*. That way they can get lost in each other's bodies and make as much noise as they want to, without drawing unwanted attention. Whenever that happens, and they're able to lose themselves together, they rock the boat much harder than the waves do.

It's not an opulent life, like the one Hannibal lived in Baltimore's high society or even Florence's academic circles, but in Hannibal's opinion it's the best one. Sharing his life with Will is better than anything he could've ever dreamed of.

He's fought hard for this life, and he's never going to give it up.

The worst part of every vacation is that it ends. Well, usually. On this vacation, running into Graham and Lecter — the FBI's most sought-after serial killer couple — proved to be worse than anything. Frederick Chilton thanks his lucky stars that they let him go. If being threatened and violently knocked unconscious constituted "letting him go".

The condition, of course, being that he can't say a word to the authorities about their whereabouts. Not that Frederick thought about doing so for even a second.

He has far, far better things to do with this precious information that he stumbled upon.

His first client after shaking off the terror from seeing the lethal lovers and returning from Cuba is Mason Verger. Although the man has had multiple successful facial reconstruction surgeries since Lecter influenced him to feed his face to dogs, Frederick still feels a hint of revulsion every time he looks at Mason. He's always turned his nose up at ugliness. Nevertheless, Frederick agreed to be the man's psychiatrist since he pays so generously.

Today, Frederick is particularly excited for his session with Mason. He is well aware that Mason has a deep and personal vendetta against Hannibal Lecter for ruining his precious face, and would go to great lengths to ensure he gets his revenge. Frederick knows that the man has promised a large monetary reward to anyone who has information about Hannibal's current location. Conveniently, he happens to have this information, and now his wallet is itching with anticipation.

"Do you have any proof to substantiate your claims, Dr. Chilton?" Mason maffles, quirking an eyebrow. He seems eager yet apprehensive about Frederick diving into their session by offering up such vital information.

"I have no reason to lie to you," Frederick replies smoothly. He's had experience placating unruly inmates at the BSHCI, so he's confident that he can sweet-talk Mason Verger.

Mason clucks. "But you *do* have a reason to be afraid of what Lecter would do to you if he found out you sold him out, doctor?"

“I told them I wouldn’t say anything to the *authorities*,” Frederick explains with a sly smile. “They seemed satisfied with that. As such, I’m not breaking any promises by telling *you*.”

Mason huffs out a laugh, which quickly turns into a coughing fit that Frederick watches with thinly veiled disdain. Soon enough, Mason recovers and clears his throat.

“If you think they will care about that loophole, you’re more insane than they are,” he sneers.

Frederick rolls his eyes. “They can hardly harm me for being clever when I kept my word. Do we have a deal or not?”

He looks at Mason expectantly, knowing how desperate the man is to get his hands on Lecter and Graham.

Mason smiles. “I like you, Dr. Chilton. You are a true capitalist. We need more people like you around. Yes, you’ve got yourself a deal.”

He presses a button on the arm of his wheelchair, and his aid rushes into the room.

“Get my dear friend Dr. Chilton here a nice fat check for his troubles, Cordell,” Mason says. “And start making arrangements to send a few of our men to Cuba. I hear the weather is most delightful this time of the year.”

Cordell smirks. “Yes, Mr. Verger.”

Frederick picks up his coat, ready to get paid and get out of his rich client’s house. Their session only lasted a few minutes, but it’s clear that with his help, Mason’s therapy has improved greatly.

“It’s been a pleasure,” Frederick offers politely, eyes glued to Cordell’s hand writing the check.

“Oh please,” Mason replies with a dark smile, “the pleasure’s all mine.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> Will doesn't know what to make of this feeling. He's had it for the past couple of weeks, on and off, but in that time it's been gradually growing like the blister he's tried to ignore on the heel of his foot. Enough to notice, enough to start seriously suspecting that something is wrong. Enough to do something about it.
>
> They're being watched.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will hates the feeling. It's unsettling to the bone, giving him goosebumps and making the hairs on the back of his neck stiffen.

His intuition is almost never wrong, and over the years he's learned to trust it. Whenever he can sense malignant secrecy in the air, it's for a reason, more often than not. On the other hand, Will's overly vivid imagination can be his worst enemy at times, especially when paired with paranoia. He can paint pictures of worst case scenarios in front of his own eyes, when they're not actually warranted.

So, Will doesn't know what to make of this feeling. He's had it for the past couple of weeks, on and off, but in that time it's been gradually growing like the blister he's tried to ignore on the heel of his foot. Enough to notice, enough to start seriously suspecting that something is wrong. Enough to do something about it.

They're being watched.

Will can feel eyes on him whenever he and Hannibal are out in public. When he senses that someone may be looking at them he turns his head, and out of the corner of his eye he can see a flash of quick movement; whoever it is that's watching them ducking out of his line of

sight at exactly the right time. He immediately alerts Hannibal, but of course by that point, there is nothing left to see.

Hannibal always takes his hand and reassures him that nobody is going to hurt them, that if they were truly being followed he'd pick up on it too, but Will can't shake the unnerving sensation and he won't distrust his instincts.

Sometimes, it follows him home. Will knows what it's like to live in a secluded place, he's lived like that most of his adult life. He knows how startling even the smallest sounds can be in the quietude of the wild nature surrounding his small house. That's why Will can immediately recognize when some sounds are *foreign,* like uninvited company lurking just outside the safety of their walls.

There's human-shaped shadows in the windows. And sometimes, when Will is alone in the house and stays completely still and silent, just to test his suspicions, he can hear a faint click of a camera shutter opening and closing.

"I saw it again last night," Will starts as they eat breakfast, anxiously drumming his fingers on the glass of juice in his hand. "You'd gone to bed and I was still downstairs. There was someone outside the window, Hannibal. I saw them."

"I don't doubt you, dear," Hannibal replies, serene and undisturbed as always, "but I also don't believe it's anything to be overly concerned about. Likely some neighborhood boy wanting to catch a glimpse of his beautiful neighbor."

A smile tugs on Hannibal's mouth, but Will ignores his casual praise and eats a mouthful of bacon and eggs, savouring the taste. The breakfast is sublime, Hannibal's cooking always is, but Will is too antsy to properly enjoy it.

"We've been extremely careful all this time. I would say it's highly unlikely that the FBI have tracked us down to this location," Hannibal gently explains in an attempt to reassure him. "You worry too much, Will."

"Chilton," Will reminds grimly. *We shouldn't have let him go* , he wants to add.

“Our dear Frederick would not have exposed us to the authorities. He values his life too much,” Hannibal replies calmly.

Will exhales and has to admit that his partner is right. However, it does nothing to ease his apprehension, and in fact sends his mind spinning for possible explanations. “Local police then? Maybe someone reported a sighting of us?”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal muses. “Are you not in the mood for eggs today? More sausage instead?”

Will glances at his plate, realizing he’s been so preoccupied about someone being onto them that he’s barely eaten. He shakes his head and picks up his fork again. This isn’t the time to change the subject.

“Whoever it is, I’m concerned,” Will says through a bite of egg. “We should be more cautious. And catch them before they catch us.”

Hannibal sighs. “In all likelihood, it’s just some opportunistic burglars spying on the property to see if we own anything worth stealing.”

They’ve been living off of the wealth Hannibal’s family accumulated through the generations, as well as Will’s savings that he obtained from selling his house in Wolf Trap. Although they have kept a low profile and avoided flaunting their rather comfortable financial position, the pristine sailing boat in their front yard doesn’t exactly help matters.

“In fact, I would almost be pleased if such a lowlife crept onto our property,” Hannibal continues.

Will raises an eyebrow. “How so?”

Hannibal gives him a smile, parting his lips just enough to show the sharp edges of his teeth.

"It's always lovely when a feast delivers itself to your doorstep, instead of you having to go catch it yourself."

Will can't help chuckling out loud. It's amazing how Hannibal can always make him laugh, as well as plant an anticipatory feeling deep inside him, like the one a hungry predator feels in the wake of a hunt.

If this stalker keeps doing what they're doing, they will soon find themselves getting closely acquainted with Will and Hannibal's kitchen — and their collection of butcher knives.

"Aren't you worried about the quality of the food?" Will teases.

"Not at all," Hannibal replies smoothly. "I enjoy everyone's unique flavor. Besides, I have gotten quite good at curing meat."

Since Hannibal has, for now, offset Will's anxiety about whoever it is that is watching them, Will tries to focus on other things to occupy his time. He takes the *Mars* out fishing more frequently, works his way through their bookshelf, and always accepts Hannibal's offers for walks along the beach or into the town market.

But no matter how Will tries to distract himself, his mind always succeeds in bringing distressing thoughts to his attention.

Will's always been at the mercy of his intrusive thoughts, all the way back to when he first started working for Jack Crawford, when the grisly details of each murder would follow him home. As time went on, thoughts of others' murders morphed into thoughts of his own violence, directed straight at Hannibal. He used to fall asleep each night to mental images of reaching into Hannibal's chest to feel his slippery, blood-coated organs, or imagined knocking his shiny teeth in while he smiled at Will during one of their therapy sessions.

The desire to harm Hannibal has faded away, washed clean by the roiling waters of the Atlantic. Will's intrusive thoughts have morphed into new shapes.

At first, they were primarily focused on whoever was watching them, taking pictures of them, and all-around stalking them. Will is sure that someone is following them, and he is confident that with him and Hannibal working together, they could trap whoever it is and get to the bottom of their obsessive behavior. Then they would see if Hannibal is right and it's simply a common burglar, or if Will is right and it's someone of a higher caliber.

But Hannibal told him not to worry about it for now, and Will can begrudgingly admit that perhaps he is jumping the gun, so to speak. There's been nothing to indicate a high threat other than stalking and pictures, and he is also confident in Chilton's promise not to turn them over to the authorities. Since they are safe from the law, and whoever is following them isn't a nuisance, Will can ignore this problem for now.

He *will* ignore it for now, to reassure Hannibal that he won't worry about it. He knows that Hannibal worries about his anxiety levels, and he'll do what he can to make Hannibal at ease. He still feels guilty over all the pain that he's put Hannibal through in the past. Although he likes that he and Hannibal inspire all types of feelings in each other, they'd both experienced enough pain by each other's hand to last a lifetime.

So instead of worrying about the obvious thing, Will thinks about something else. Something that's been tugging at the back of his mind for a while, and he'd stubbornly ignored. Until now, when he decided to switch out the things to ignore and the things to focus on.

He thinks about how Hannibal hasn't said he loves him since Florence.

Will's tried not to take the omission too seriously, since they'd been busy relocating to Cuba and establishing their life here. Besides, they spend virtually all their time together and Hannibal always visibly enjoys it, not hesitating to hold Will's hand, or kiss him, or even to initiate sex between them. Hannibal's acting like a man in love, and frankly so is Will, and on the surface everything is fine.

But below the surface, uncertainty lurks.

Will's said he loves Hannibal several times, straight to his face, but Hannibal hasn't reciprocated his affirmation. Instead, he proclaims Will's beauty, waxes poetic about his feelings, and conveys how happy he is to witness Will's becoming, to share themselves with each other entirely, to be happy together. He's said all of that, sometimes so emotionally that it brings real tears to Will's eyes.

But Hannibal hasn't said he loves him.

Will can't help but question if Hannibal's feelings for him are better described as appreciation or obsession, instead of love. Hannibal is the most articulate, honest man he knows. If he loves Will, surely he would have said so.

The thing that really bothers Will about this problem is that Hannibal, in fact, *has* said it to him. Once. While they were fucking in front of Freddie Lounds's corpse.

Will had felt euphoric from passion and relief, then. Passion because of his strong love and desire for Hannibal, and relief from finally being completely honest with the man he loves and being fully accepted, even after lying to him. Their joining had been a sacred act, one performed by two people completely and utterly devoted to one another.

They said "I love you" to each other, then. In the heat of passion, at the apex of the destined consummation of their relationship.

Will worries that it was *only* that. Only a fleeting thought said in the heat of the moment, and not an accepted, fundamental, *pervasive* state of being. He doesn't want to believe it, he doesn't even want to consider the possibility; but he has to, because the evidence continues to build up. Will has no doubt to his own feelings, which is why he tells Hannibal he loves him regularly. He's concerned about how Hannibal's reply to his declarations is never, not once, a simple "I love you" in return.

Will's starting to feel a bit foolish. Is he baring his soul to Hannibal, pouring out all the feelings he's never felt for another person, only to have them be unreciprocated?

He doesn't know, and now that he's allowing himself to think about it, his anxiety about it is rapidly increasing.

Will is still ruminating on the issue after dinner one evening, lounging in the study nursing a glass of whiskey while Hannibal is seated at his desk, drawing some masterpiece. Will is stubbornly *not* thinking about the shadow he'd seen ducking into an alley when he'd gone to buy some of the special fruit Hannibal likes earlier that day, so he resigns himself to thinking about what had happened after dinner.

Hannibal had made them a delicious meal of Cuban-style paella, predictably swapping out a few of the seafood ingredients for meat from their personal stores. He kept the lobster tails however, and once everything was combined with the saffron rice and red wine, the paella was delectable. Not that Will expected it not to be.

After eating their fill, they had moved into the kitchen and began cleaning up the dishes like normal. Will washed, and Hannibal dried. The only difference from any other night was that after Will finished scrubbing one particularly difficult stain and turned to give the plate to Hannibal, he was met with a glob of soap suds stuck right on Hannibal's nose.

Will blinked, and Hannibal blinked back. Then Will burst out laughing and had to set the dish back down into the sink for fear of breaking it while he was shaking with full-body chuckles.

Hannibal made an affronted sound, but Will could tell the man was masking his own smile. Will finally took pity on his beloved and wiped the dollop of bubbles off Hannibal's nose with a gentle hand. The moment Hannibal was soap-free, he leaned forward to press a kiss on Will's forehead. Will could feel his lips curved up in a smile, making Will's own smile grow bigger.

"Thank you, mylimasis," Hannibal murmured, eyes twinkling as he pulled back from Will's space. Will snorted with remnant amusement, and the two of them made quick work of the rest of the dishes.

It had been a pleasant evening, but now that Will is sitting in his comfortable armchair, drinking whiskey and reflecting upon his day, a detail from that interaction stands out.

Mylimasis.

Hannibal has called him that before, many times. In fact, he probably says that more regularly than Will says “I love you”, now that he thinks about it. Will’s never actually known what it means, but he figures it's some sort of nickname, or term of endearment.

Suddenly, he has to know.

Will has had more than his regular couple of fingers of whiskey over the course of the night, and combined with the wine they drank with dinner, the alcohol is starting to wrap around his brain like a warm and fuzzy blanket. It drives his inhibitions down to zero and his curiosity about the mysterious Lithuanian word up to a hundred. Will sets his glass down on the wooden table with a clink, makes an offhanded excuse about getting something from upstairs when Hannibal looks up, and sneaks off into his and Hannibal’s shared bedroom.

Hannibal’s iPad is in its usual place, charging on the man’s nightstand. Will types in the passcode — Hannibal doesn’t keep any secrets, not from him at least — and opens the Internet browser. Normally he’d use his phone for research like this, but their burner phones come with very limited data allowance, and Will used his up a week ago, when looking up the best kinds of fishing bait to use to catch the local fish species.

A quick Google search informs him that *mylimasis* easily translates to beloved, darling, sweetheart, my love — all the words Hannibal calls him in English too. *All the words that suggest that Hannibal loves him, but without saying it directly* .

Will knows he should be delighted because Hannibal uses such a vast array of terms of endearment when referring to him, even in multiple languages. But instead, there is a jarring feeling in Will’s chest. It feels like something’s not right.

Will remembers his time working at the FBI, where listening to that same jarring feeling allowed them to catch all the most elusive killers. Despite the evidence being there, Will always knew when something didn’t add up. When something was missing.

It feels like that now, too, and to Will's frustration, he can't figure out exactly what's bothering him. Everything should be fine, with Hannibal calling him such sweet nicknames.

But everything is not fine, somehow.

In his last attempt to put his mind at ease, Will types *how to say "I love you" in Lithuanian* into the Google search bar. Maybe Hannibal has said it to him before, but Will didn't understand because he doesn't speak Lithuanian?

But no, the translated sentence looks nothing like the foreign-language phrases Hannibal speaks to him.

Will groans and shuts the iPad off, having enough sense left in his whiskey-addled brain to exit out of the search window. He can't think about this right now, he needs to approach this with a clear mind… or at least a hungover mind. He did his best work at the FBI when he was working off a hangover, after all.

Will puts the iPad back where he found it and fumbles through removing his clothes before slipping into his side of the bed. It's not that late but he's already exhausted, weighed down by being worried about the stalker, then swinging to laughing about the soap suds on Hannibal's face, and finally ending the day by fixating on Hannibal's almost refusal to say "I love you" but eagerness to shower Will in various terms of endearment.

Will snuggles into his pillow and sighs. Why won't his brain give him a break? Why does he have to ruminate on every possible thing that hints at being out of place?

You know why , a little voice whispers in the back of his mind. *You don't want to lose him.*

As Will flips over onto his side to look at Hannibal's empty side of bed, he knows the thought to be true. He's terrified of losing Hannibal, and he'll do whatever it takes to prevent that from happening. Maybe he's paranoid, but if the paranoia serves a purpose by ensuring that the life they have together is protected, then Will can't find it within himself to fight it.

Maybe that's the thing bothering Will. That he's so willing to protect Hannibal and the life they have together, but Hannibal isn't acting like he is. He's waving off Will's concerns, almost like he doesn't care about being discovered and separated.

It's that fear that stays with Will as he lays awake, and then follows him into his nightmares when Hannibal comes to bed and Will is finally able to fall asleep.

The sun is already high in the sky when Hannibal awakens. Will is still soundly asleep, his brain taking its time to trudge back to sobriety. Hannibal gets up briefly to place a glass of water on Will's nightstand and make himself a coffee, then settles back in bed with his iPad in his lap. He starts his morning with a routine browse of the Internet for any sightings of them, and what the FBI is currently up to.

Someone named Clarice Starling is "the new Will Graham", using her brilliant brain to catch killers. Someone called the Tennessee Triggerman is the new Chesapeake Ripper, spreading terror on the East coast of the U.S.. Someone whose name Hannibal can never remember is the new Freddie Lounds, writing articles for Tattlecrime about it all. The only key player who has remained unchanged is Jack Crawford, still miraculously heading the BAU — and still hunting Hannibal and Will.

Hannibal smiles in amusement and switches to a new browser window to check the Tattlecrime website. As he goes to type it in, the most recent searches pop up as suggestions. Hannibal doesn't remember using his iPad last night, and he certainly hasn't looked up Lithuanian expressions of love.

It appears as if his darling Will became curious, and decided to teach himself some Lithuanian in his liquor-infused haze.

Hannibal lets a fond chuckle leave his lips. In addition to googling *mylimasis* , it appears that Will also searched up how to say "I love you" in Hannibal's native tongue. Perhaps, he is planning to surprise Hannibal by saying it one day. That's his Will, always finding new ways to express how dear Hannibal is to him.

Immediately, Hannibal's hand goes to brush through the curls on his beloved's head and delicately caress his cheek. Will stirs slightly, nuzzling into the warmth of Hannibal's hand in his sleep. He regards Will with affectionate eyes and lets the man continue resting.

Poor Will worries too much.

They've successfully eluded Jack and the FBI by relocating to a different continent, and no one knows of their current whereabouts. They have managed to leave their previous lives behind and can now focus on building a new one, together. Hannibal enjoys the idyllic domesticity he has going with Will. Their mundane everyday routine is balanced by the thrill of hiding from the authorities, and their romantic cuddling on the couch is balanced by mind-blowing sex on every surface of the house.

His relationship with Will has always been one of extremes, and now Hannibal is quite happy that they are able to balance out those extremes together. It feels like a dream come true, which makes Hannibal chuckle as he reflects upon it, because before he met Will and was completely swept off his feet, he'd never imagined that his greatest dream would be to simply settle down in a domestic, normal life with his beloved.

Now that he has this, he's determined to enjoy every single second of it. He doesn't want to think about anyone else other than Will, and he doesn't want to do anything except spend time with him. The best part is, he *can* .

Their life together is comparable to heaven on Earth, since it has all the positives of cohabitation and none of the negatives that would be expected in a normal relationship, due to Will's empathy. It's truly a fascinating gift, one that Hannibal has been entranced by for years, but now he has a new appreciation for it.

After their miscommunication was resolved in Florence, it's clear to Hannibal that Will's empathy is attuned to his emotions and state of mind particularly well; that is, now Hannibal is not able to keep secrets from Will, even if he wanted to. They know each other like they know themselves, so they never have any trouble, save for Hannibal scolding Will for not using enough sunscreen, or Will getting annoyed if Hannibal says something slightly too pretentious.

But even those little conflicts, Hannibal treasures close to his heart.

Hannibal didn't ever think he'd meet someone who understands him so flawlessly, so being with Will is better than any dream come true. Will can sense his moods and feelings, and understand him even when Hannibal speaks in his typical convoluted and flowery fashion. He has always been able to pick up on the core meaning behind the vague metaphors Hannibal uses frequently. He must know that Hannibal loves to communicate in grandiloquent expressions rather than simple words, and has become accustomed to understanding it easily.

And indeed, Hannibal delights in coming up with new and unique ways to express his love to Will. His vast knowledge of various classical literature, paired with his impeccable visual memory, allows him to use romantic quotes to proclaim his adoration towards his beloved. Similarly, when there are not enough words in the English language to describe how much he cherishes Will, Hannibal employs other languages.

For instance, there is special significance in using the French phrase " *Tu me manques* ", which translates to "You are missing from me"; as opposed to the English equivalent of "I miss you". Hannibal prefers the French version because his existence is incomplete when Will is missing; it's like he's missing a vital organ, an essential part of him.

To Hannibal, expressions like this are more elaborate and meaningful than a simple "I love you". Hannibal loves Will, a fact they are both aware of. To convey it, he'd rather describe and explain how and why he loves Will, using all kinds of multilingual phrases and literature quotes, instead of simply stating the fact.

Just like how his romantic devotion is never going to grow dull and repetitive, neither will the proclamations of his feelings. Likewise, Hannibal is certain that due to his heightened empathy, Will would never fail to understand the deep meaning behind all those intricate wordings.

But at the end of the day, when Hannibal settles into the bed he shares with Will, all the loquacious declarations fade away and a singular, undecorated affirmation from the ancient Song of Solomon dances through the warm softness of his mind.

My beloved is mine, and I am his.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Hope you enjoyed the second chapter :)

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

"A jewelry store, Hannibal?" Will asks. "Neither of us wear jewelry."

"Not yet," Hannibal hums.

The weather in Cuba is nice year-round, but it's almost perfect in the spring. The sun is shining but it's not too hot, and the humidity is very bearable. It's Will's first time experiencing spring in Cuba, and he loves it.

They had moved at the end of last summer, so Will's had time to live through all the seasons in the new tropical climate. Spring is his favorite, by far. He loves spending all his time outside because of the enjoyable weather, and has the urge to do just that today.

It's a weekend, so they are both free to spend time together however they want. Hannibal suggests they venture into town to leisurely shop, and Will agrees with a smile. It's good to get out of the house, where he's been switching about anxiously thinking about whoever it is that's been following them and anxiously thinking about Hannibal's seemingly inability to say he loves him.

They walk through town hand-in-hand, nodding to a few of the shop-owners that they'd come to befriend. Hannibal stops to chat with the florist, a sweet old woman who is grateful to him for buying so many of her flowers. Will stops to talk with one of the guys at the fish market, who he's struck up a tentative friendship with, thanks to them both fishing in the same places.

They have established a life here, and Will feels like he belongs. That sense of belonging to a community, and belonging to Hannibal, is why Will feels so paranoid about the mysterious stalker. He doesn't want anything to jeopardize this life that they've worked so hard to have.

Will feels calmer now, as they walk through town. He hasn't felt the shadow over his shoulder, or the prickly feeling of eyes on his back. Whoever their stalker is, it seems like they have taken the day off.

They're leisurely strolling through the touristy part of the city, where all the high-class shops are crowded together around a bright courtyard, when Hannibal tugs on Will's hand and pulls him in the direction of a specific store. Will quirks a brow as he sees the displays in the window, full of sparkling gemstones.

"A jewelry store, Hannibal?" he asks. "Neither of us wear jewelry."

"Not yet," Hannibal hums.

Will's eyebrows rise further, but he lets Hannibal lead him into the expensive-looking boutique. Gold on the left, silver on the right, all decorated with colourful and precious stones. Will's eyes get lost in the sea of glitz, as his mind works overtime trying to figure out what Hannibal is after. New cufflinks? Or a watch, perhaps?

But no, his partner determinedly glides towards the display of rings, smoothly bypassing the cheaper end of the range in favour of the more costly ones, with higher-karat gold and bigger gemstones. Will's breath hitches in his throat.

His and Hannibal's relationship has always been as far from societal norms as humanly possible, so Will never thought that the traditional and tangible indicators of love and devotion would be something they would consider. Their bond is already stronger than marriage, and their union consummated with flesh and blood, the core elements of human existence.

But although Will has never thought about getting *rings* before, he realises that he wants it. He wants the physical representation of their love encircling his finger, a constant reminder that Hannibal will never leave. He wants to place an identical band on Hannibal's finger, too, binding him to Will in yet another way, claiming Hannibal as his, and only his, for the rest of their lives.

Will can question Hannibal's devotion with his refusal to say "I love you", but if they exchanged rings then there would never be any doubt. It would be a clear declaration, and the knot inside Will's chest could finally loosen. Will could finally breathe again, with a ring snug around his finger in a clear mark of everlasting love.

He steps closer to Hannibal, shoulder to shoulder, and takes his hand as they continue browsing the wide selection of jewelry. After a short while Hannibal pauses and turns towards Will, bringing their interlaced hands up. He eyes Will's fingers inquisitively for a moment, then places a small kiss to his knuckles.

"I'd guess size 10," he hums, more to himself than Will, and goes back to looking at the rings.

"Sweetheart, you can't bring me into a ring shop and not explain your intentions," Will teases.

It's not that he's unclear on Hannibal's intentions - how could it be unclear when they're in a jewelry store, talking about ring sizes - but Will thinks that before purchasing meaningful jewelry like this, there should be a discussion of some sort. A discussion about what it means to wear matching rings. A proposal of some sort. *Or a love declaration, at the very least*.

But no, Hannibal decides to bring Will into a jewelry store completely out of the blue, with no warning, no hints that he'd been considering anything like this.

"My intention is to exchange wedding rings with you one day," Hannibal tells him, as if it's the most logical thing on the planet.

And it makes sense, Will supposes. But at the same time, it doesn't. How can Hannibal talk about a goddamn *marriage proposal*, when he hasn't even told Will that he loves him yet?

"... unless the notion of traditional marriage doesn't appeal to you," Hannibal adds.

It does appeal to Will, of course it does. He would be more than happy to wear a ring, and definitely isn't opposed to everything else the commitment implies. Will's devotion to his partner is unwavering and he has no reservations about proclaiming it, but he isn't as sure about Hannibal's motivations.

"Why does it appeal to you?" he can't help but ask in return.

He's trying to be as tactful as possible when he probes about Hannibal's intentions. Will is very aware that they are in a public place, and there are other people present in the little shop that can likely overhear them. He really does not want to have this discussion here and now, but he has to know. Does Hannibal want to exchange rings with him because it's simply the next logical step in their relationship, or because he actually loves Will and never wants to part from him?

Will waits with bated breath for Hannibal's answer, for him to smile and say "Of course it does, dear Will, I love you," or something to that effect.

"Why not?" Hannibal responds instead, tilting his head.

And suddenly, Will feels blood rushing to his head. Why not? *Why not?* Will asks Hannibal why he wants to marry him and he fucking says *why not?*

"Oh, I didn't realize it was such a casual decision," Will snaps.

Hannibal frowns. "Casual in the sense that it was easy, I suppose."

"Yeah, it makes sense, right? The next logical step?" Will sasses back.

Hannibal's frown deepens and he reaches out his hand. "Yes. Will, why are you — "

Will slaps Hannibal's hand away, but leans in closer to ensure that what he says next will not be overheard:

"It *especially* makes sense to do it here, where a married couple would draw infinitely less attention than two single men hanging around together, right?"

Hannibal looks very confused now. "Darling — "

"Have you even thought about it?" Will interrupts, hating that he can feel tears welling up in his eyes. "Have you thought about what it *means,* for me? What I want it to mean for you, too?"

Hannibal stares at him, then glances to the display of rings under the counter, then looks back to Will, somehow even more perplexed. "I thought it meant the same for us both."

"Well," Will says stiffly, "I guess it doesn't."

He turns away from Hannibal and storms out of the shop, rushing to get away before the tears spill from his eyes and stain his cheeks with shades of hurt and misery.

Will walks all the way home, the hour-long journey passing without him even realising. He takes a shortcut through the woods instead of staying on the narrow gravel road that leads to their secluded house. It's quicker this way, and trekking through the overgrown grass and low-hanging branches provides Will with a physical way of channeling out his frustration.

He approaches the property from the side, pushing his way through the thick trees. As the cream-coloured wall of the house comes into view, so does something else. *Someone* else.

A lean figure, dressed in dark clothing. Snooping around, peeking inside the lounge room window. If this doesn't make it obvious that they're being watched, Will doesn't know what else would.

If only Hannibal were here with him. Then, he would immediately see that Will was right all along.

He tries to creep closer without alerting the intruder. If he made the slightest sound, the man would see him and flee. Or worse, try to attack Will. Will isn't sure what the stalker's intentions are, after all. In either case, approaching without a weapon would be unwise.

Will makes a swift detour into the shed his boat is stowed in, picking up the first long and sturdy object he can find — a shovel. When he re-emerges, the suspicious man has left the window. For a moment, Will thinks that he may have lost his chance of finding more about the intruder, but then he hears sounds resembling clanking of metal tools coming from around the corner, where the back door is.

He approaches as silently and slowly as he can, eventually rediscovering the man crouched in front of the door, concentrating too hard on picking the lock to hear Will sneak up behind him. With two leaps and a swing of his arms holding the shovel, Will easily knocks the stranger out, and his limp body hits the ground with a loud thud.

Will wipes the nervous sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand and waits for his breathing to even out. He casts his eyes down to his makeshift weapon, the shiny metal now stained red with blood.

He'd intended to knock the intruder unconscious, not dead, but judging by the amount of blood on the shovel, it appears that he may have used more force than was warranted. He blatantly realized just how hard he was gripping the handle of the shovel, and how heavy his breaths were coming. His walk home had done nothing to ease his frustration towards Hannibal, but it seems like killing their stalker did.

Either way, the man wouldn't wake up any time soon, giving Will time to collect himself and figure out what he's going to do next. He steps closer to the unmoving body, pushing it to lay on its back so that Will can see his face. It's no one he recognises, but he didn't expect to be able to.

He reaches into the stranger's jacket pocket, hoping to find objects that would give him hints regarding who the man is, and what reason he had to stalk them. He immediately locates a brown leather wallet, and *bingo*. Will searches through various credit cards under several different names, one of them matching the name on the driver's license. An U.S. driver's license, he notes.

This man is a foreigner travelling under fake identities, just like them.

Another rush of sweat breaks the surface of Will's skin at the discovery, but he isn't surprised. It makes sense for the nosy stalker to have a connection to the States, since it's where all of Will and Hannibal's enemies are. However, it's a very bad sign that the man has multiple IDs. It implies that he's some sort of professional, not an amateur neighbor like Hannibal's been trying to tell him.

There are no badges indicating involvement with law enforcement, but Will still doesn't dismiss the possibility of the man being an undercover agent sent to spy on them. He wouldn't put it past Jack and the FBI to come up with a scheme like that, after the trail of bodies they left in Florence. But, if the man had already informed Jack of their whereabouts, Will doesn't know why the full force of the FBI hasn't already descended upon them.

He examines the rest of the contents of the wallet, finding some crumpled Cuban pesos, as well as several business cards. One of them in particular catches his attention.

Verger meatpacking industries.

That's when Will realises who orchestrated all the stalking he and Hannibal have been experiencing in the past few weeks, and he exhales both in relief and anger. The authorities are no longer a threat, so he can relax there. Mason Verger, however, is his own beast that requires a reckoning.

Now that Will finally has proof that his fears are true, Hannibal can no longer deny they aren't in danger.

Hannibal drives back to the house alone, dejected.

He doesn't really understand what just occurred at the jewelry shop, and it distresses him. He thought that he and Will were on the same page, that they knew each other's minds without having to speak a word, but after their argument over wedding rings Hannibal is left with the distinct impression that there's a disconnect.

He knows he didn't say anything wrong, but it seemed like Will didn't truly understand him.

It's disheartening, but Hannibal is more concerned with Will's feelings than their miscommunication. He loves Will. His pain is Hannibal's pain, and Hannibal wants to relieve him of it. He's always wanted what was best for Will. In the past, it was about coaxing Will to become his whole, authentic self without shame. Now, Hannibal's efforts are concentrated on making Will feel better when he is angry, or sad, or exhausted.

Usually this manifests with Hannibal pouring Will his favorite whiskey after dinner when he's stressed, or holding him in bed whenever he's sad, or making him his favorite breakfast every morning to see him smile. Hannibal loves Will with his entire being, and he'll do whatever it takes to make his beloved happy.

That's why it's so concerning to Hannibal that Will stormed away from him when they were looking at rings together.

Maybe Hannibal miscalculated. Maybe he's being too overbearing, too stifling in his affections. Maybe Will doesn't feel as strongly for Hannibal as Hannibal does for Will.

It's not the only explanation for what happened at the jewelry store, but it's the most likely one. Hannibal was so happy to pull Will into the shop, excited to pick out rings together. He's been mindlessly rubbing his ring finger for a while now, wondering how it would look with a precious metal band on it, a clear symbol that he belongs to Will and that Will belongs to him. He wants it, so much.

When Will walked out of the shop without him, it felt like Hannibal's heart left with him. And he supposes that it did. Will *is* his heart.

Hannibal sighs and turns the car into the gravel road that leads to their house. He hopes that Will is home safe, and won't punish Hannibal by staying out all night and leaving him at home to worry.

He hopes that he's wrong about his instincts, and that Will really does love him enough to marry him.

Hannibal turns the car off and strolls to the front door of their house, his body long accustomed to hiding his true emotions with graceful steps. He tries the door and it's locked, causing Hannibal's brows to furrow in concern. It appears that Will isn't here after all.

He twists the key in the lock and opens the door with a soft click, walking inside unhurriedly. He has no real desire to be in their house alone, but he has nowhere else to go. Hannibal drops his keys on the nearby table and toes his shoes off before trudging down the hallway, resolved to spend the night curled up in bed with his worn copy of Dante's *Inferno*.

However, as he passes the dining room on his way to the stairs, an unfamiliar mass of black catches his eye and he turns around, stopping dead in his tracks and eyes widening.

Will is standing on the other side of the room, looking down at the body that's sprawled out on the dining table. The scene is so reminiscent of the time when Hannibal sent Randall Tier to him that it makes his breath catch.

"Hannibal," Will says slowly, in a tightly controlled voice. "I told you we have a problem."

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> “Will,” he whispers as they stand back-to-back, Hannibal facing the back door as Will faces the front. “I can’t fathom how you came to such an outlandish conclusion. I proclaim my love for you every day.”
>
> Footsteps echo softly across their wooden floors, and Will tightens his grip on the knife.
>
> “Exactly the problem!” he whispers back, snappy. “You wax poetic about it, go on and on with convoluted metaphors. You’ve never actually *said it.”*

Chapter Notes

> Wow, we are sorry it's been so long since we last updated! We've both been really busy with our various responsibilities. Thanks for understanding! We're hoping to go back to semi-regular updates after this.

Hannibal eyes the corpse on the dinner table with the same silent bewilderment one would give an unexpected guest at a dinner party.

“Who is this?” he inquires, lifting his gaze to meet Will’s.

A quick brush of his fingers across the lifeless man’s still warm hand tells Hannibal that he hasn’t been dead for long.

“The stalker I told you about. See? *See?* I was right,” Will stresses, shifting his weight stiffly from one foot to another.

“I never doubted you.”

Hannibal always believed that Will was onto something, but that doesn't mean he let himself become overly concerned about their safety. They always take precautions about being discovered, and are both capable fighters, should anyone find them.

He crosses the room to stand beside Will, where he can take a proper look at the anonymous stalker's face.

"Verger hired him," Will tells him, "meaning that Chilton sold us out. We shouldn't have let him go."

"Perhaps we shouldn't have," Hannibal agrees pensively.

Grim shadows fall over Will's face. "Well, it's too late now."

"You had a chance to speak to this man?" Hannibal presumes, based on Will's knowledge of who is pulling the strings behind all this.

"No."

Will's gloomy look darkens even further. Hannibal doesn't push it.

Will probably has a good reason for not getting to ask any questions, such as having to fight for his life after being ambushed by the intruder. Hannibal's eyes flick to Will, taking in his dishevelled but seemingly uninjured state. A thousand tragic scenarios dash through his mind, a plethora of possible ways his beloved could have ended up seriously hurt, or worse. Hannibal lets out a quiet exhale of relief after concluding that his Will is safe and sound.

The younger man offers him a small rectangular object, which Hannibal recognises as a business card. The familiar Verger brand tells him exactly how Will figured out who sent the stalker to spy on them.

Although Will looks unharmed, Hannibal still wants to make sure.

“Are you all right?” he asks with well-measured concern in his voice.

“Fuckin’ peachy,” Will scoffs, more bite to his words than Hannibal would have expected.

He purses his lips and averts his eyes, training them on the dead body instead. He still doesn’t understand what angered Will so much in the jewelry store, but it seems that his beloved is still in an incredibly abrasive mood. The skilled psychiatrist in Hannibal knows to back off and let him be for now, as not to escalate matters into another conflict.

“Sorry,” Will mumbles not a minute later, giving Hannibal another look, softer this time. “I mean, yeah, I’m fine. He barely touched me.”

“Good,” Hannibal says. He knows that Will can take care of himself, but that knowledge doesn’t stop Hannibal from worrying about him.

“Shall we carve, then?” he asks, nodding to the body.

Will exhales heavily. “You take care of it. I need a bath.”

With that, he trudges up the stairs, leaving Hannibal alone with the dead man on their dining room table.

Hannibal sighs, then rolls up his sleeves and gets to work.

He’s carved up dozens of bodies in his long life, and is happy to do so without Will this time, to allow his beloved some rest. However, his mind can’t help but make a connection to the

last time Will left a fresh corpse on his dining table, and how they eviscerated Randall Tier together. How Will allowed Hannibal, for the first time, to tend to his wounds.

Hannibal wants to do the same tonight. Will had told him the truth about not being injured from his fight with the Verger man. However, that did not mean that Hannibal could not take care of him in other ways. Besides, he feels as if he'd done something wrong in the ring shop, earlier. He dislikes it when Will is angry at him, so he will do his best to assure his partner that he did not mean whatever slight Will is convinced he did.

Hannibal makes quick work on the body, putting a few delectable pieces in their fridge and cutting up the rest for easier disposal. Once the cleanup is done and he's washed his hands, Hannibal ascends the stairs, hoping that Will is still soaking in the bath.

He's in luck, and Will is indeed still in the tub when he gets to the bathroom. His beloved's eyes are closed, his head the only part of his body not submerged in the steaming water. Hannibal can smell that Will's even made use of the lavender bath oil they bought from a local vendor a few months ago.

Closing the door behind him so as not to let the steam escape, Hannibal gracefully begins removing his clothes. Will does not open his eyes to look at him, even when Hannibal slides, naked, into the bath with him. He simply tilts forward to let Hannibal settle behind him, then sighs as he leans back to rest his body against Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal wraps his arms around him and lowers his head to press his face into Will's curls. He deeply inhales the scent of him, then brings a hand up to massage the knotted muscles in Will's shoulders. Will groans and relaxes more into Hannibal's hold. Hannibal continues to massage Will's shoulders, glad that he can do this, at least, to calm him. He wants to show Will how much he loves him, even through their arguments.

The fact that Will does not push Hannibal away when his hand drifts lower shows him that Will also loves him through their arguments.

Will lets out a content sigh when Hannibal fondles him, shifting to stretch out his legs into a more comfortable position. The tension in Will's tightly-coiled muscles is obvious, and Hannibal knows exactly how to get him to relax. His hand wraps around Will's cock, immediately feeling it start to stiffen against his fingers.

Being underwater makes the slide of Hannibal's hand more smooth, and soon Will is bucking up into his fist in earnest, head tilted back to rest on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal nuzzles the side of the younger man's neck, nosing the damp hair that's been stuck to the skin. His own arousal is evident, caught between Will's inner thighs. Will presses his legs closer together, sweetening the friction and giving Hannibal something to rut against.

They rock against each other, short little breaths and moans filling the room. Some of the water splashes over the edge of the tub and onto the floor, but they're both too preoccupied to care. Will cranes his neck sideways so he can press his mouth to Hannibal's, teeth tugging at the bottom lip. Hannibal drinks up every sound Will makes as the hand pumping his cock increases in pace.

It feels like they are animals like this, rutting against each other; but it is also tender. Hannibal is showing Will how much he adores him with every pump of his hand on Will's cock, with every hot kiss he presses to Will's throat.

It soon gets to be too much. Will clenches his thighs tight one more time, Hannibal gives a particularly tight squeeze, and they seize up against each other, spilling at the same time into the lavender-scented bathwater.

Hannibal catches his breath with another kiss to Will's damp curls, and releases his grip on Will's softening cock to wrap his arms around his beloved again. Will pants after his release, muscles unclenching all at once and sinking back into Hannibal's chest.

"Will," Hannibal says, mouthing his ear. "Do not worry about Mason Verger. Let him send more men after us. We can kill them all."

To Hannibal's surprise, Will does not smile happily at him. In fact, he does not smile at all, but rather opens his eyes slightly to fix Hannibal with an unimpressed look.

"That's not sustainable," he replies. "For someone so smart, I thought you'd have realized it."

Will gets out of the tub, water churning and splashing around him, and Hannibal is left frowning. He wants to ask Will what he means by that, and why he's been so dejected ever since the jewelry store debacle. He doesn't think it's related to the Verger problem, but then again, Will's always been able to make connections that Hannibal hasn't.

But Will's eyes are heavy with exhaustion, and Hannibal knows better than to demand answers from him tonight.

"Come to bed, Hannibal," Will sighs, wrapping a towel around his waist and heading towards their bedroom. "It's late."

Hannibal obeys, but does not get a lot of sleep that night with Will stubbornly facing away from him on their shared bed.

Will wakes up feeling annoyed.

Thankfully, he was able to sleep off the exhaustion, but the problems from yesterday are still with him, demanding attention. Normally, Will wouldn't mind solving problems, especially if it involved killing those who were after them, but this time Hannibal is infuriating him instead of assisting him.

He's acting like the Verger threat isn't a big deal, when all it would take is one mistake, *one* slip-up for them to either be killed or captured.

Will is taking the looming danger very seriously, because he's terrified of losing this life with Hannibal. The fact that Hannibal isn't bothered makes Will think that he truly doesn't care about preserving what they have. When Will combines this flippancy with Hannibal's inability to say "I love you", he's left with one conclusion.

Hannibal doesn't truly love him, and is just coasting through living with Will like he's been coasting through his entire life.

Will swallows roughly and gets out of bed, refusing to let despair overtake him. He's got work to do.

He dresses purposefully, in loose, unassuming clothes fit for blending into the background of busy streets, but also practical for active fights. He doesn't know what he'll find when he goes hunting for the other Verger goons, but it's best to be prepared.

If Hannibal isn't going to deal with this threat, Will is.

He goes downstairs, heading straight to the refrigerator to grab something for breakfast before he goes out. He decides on some cheese and leftover slices of meat, since he can eat them on the move. But when he closes the fridge door shut, he almost jumps out of his skin.

Hannibal is standing right there, a dark set of eyes trained on Will's.

"Jesus Christ," Will swears, clutching his food to his chest. "Were you just standing behind the fridge, waiting for me to close it?!"

Hannibal had appeared silently and without any warning, like a predator creeping up on its unsuspecting prey. Will wonders if he did so deliberately, if this was him subconsciously trying to intimidate Will for giving him the cold shoulder last night.

"My apologies for startling you," Hannibal responds. "But I wanted to be sure to catch you before you left to go wherever it is you're going."

"I'm *going* to deal with the Vergers," Will exhales in frustration. "What is it?"

"I'd like to talk about what happened yesterday," Hannibal says matter-of-factly.

Will sighs. “I’ve got no time, Hannibal. There’s more of them coming, and somebody’s got to make sure we’re prepared.”

“Hunting down Verger’s men can wait,” Hannibal dismisses. “Please, Will.”

With that dismissal, Will’s frustration erupts into anger.

“No it can’t!” he yells. “I can see that you don’t care about this. You don’t care about *us!”*

Hannibal frowns. “I do care, which is why I am asking to talk about things.”

“We don’t have time to talk,” Will spits. “The Vergers are a huge threat, Hannibal, and they need to be dealt with immediately.”

He shoves his food into his mouth and chews quickly, partly because he really does need to eat fast and get going, but mostly because he knows how much Hannibal hates bad eating habits.

True to form, Hannibal’s face twitched in disgust. “Will…”

Will glares at him as he continues to chew on the pieces of meat he pulled from the fridge. Hannibal gnaws on his lip and takes a fortifying breath.

“The Vergers are important, yes, but so is the fact that you did not seem fond of the idea of marriage. Judging by how vehemently you wish to preserve our safety, I assumed you see me as a long-term partner,” he says, voice awfully measured, as if holding back a roaring sea of emotions. “But I must have been mistaken.”

Will blinks in confusion. So, Hannibal *does* want to marry him. Yet, he still won’t say out loud the three most important words. The three words that Will’s deprived heart is dying to hear.

“You can’t be talking about marriage when you haven’t even told me that you love me!” Will exclaims, exasperated.

It’s Hannibal’s turn to look confused. “But Will, I —”

Suddenly, their attention is drawn off each other by a faint clicking noise. Will’s experienced enough to know that it’s the sound of a lock clicking, and exhales in frustration as he turns to grab a knife from the block on the kitchen counter. Hannibal purses his lips and does the same, and their argument is put on hold for a few moments.

Except, apparently Hannibal doesn’t know when to stop.

“Will,” he whispers as they stand back-to-back, Hannibal facing the back door as Will faces the front. “I can’t fathom how you came to such an outlandish conclusion. I proclaim my love for you every day.”

Footsteps echo softly across their wooden floors, and Will tightens his grip on the knife.

“Exactly the problem!” he whispers back, snappy. “You wax poetic about it, go on and on with convoluted metaphors. You’ve never actually *said it.”*

Just then, a man dressed in all black steps into the kitchen, a gun in his hand. Will immediately jumps forward with his knife, slashing in a wide arc and catching the guy off-guard just enough to land a shallow cut on his neck.

“Said what?” Hannibal says at normal volume. There’s distress in his tone, but Will can feel him against his back, unhesitating at lashing out at his own intruder coming from the back door.

Will's guy raises his gun but Will expertly cuts his hand, causing him to cry out and drop the weapon. Will uses that split-second to kick him in the stomach, knocking the wind out of him and making him gasp.

"I love you!" Will shouts in frustration as he slashes the intruder's throat deep.

Blood spills out all over the guy's black clothes and onto the floor, and Will watches him collapse with chest heaving, body still tense. He can't believe Hannibal is so dense.

He hears a similar thud behind him and turns to see Hannibal's assailant sprawled out on the floor as well, a knife sticking out of his chest. A fleeting thought goes through Will's mind about how Hannibal rarely stabs people, preferring to slash and cut, but it's quickly overtaken by the anger he still feels about this entire situation.

A single " *Oh"* leaves Hannibal's lips as the realisation sets in. Will stares at him, eyes ablaze and his chest rising and falling rapidly as he tries to catch his breath.

"I love you, Will, more than the ocean loves the moon," Hannibal declares, his voice hoarse from the fighting but soft with devotion. "The way you pull me in is stronger than gravity itself, and I will erode the entire earth to dust just to be with y-"

"Hannibal, just *shut up*."

The harsh cutting tone of Will's voice makes the other man halt. He goes silent, and from that, Will deduces that Hannibal is astonished by the rude response to his direct love confession; but more than that, confused as to why Will still appears so dissatisfied.

"How hard is it to just say 'I love you' and nothing else? For God's sake, stop with the metaphors!" Will shouts, flinging the bloody knife into the sink out of frustration. "Just stop. I'm so sick of all this."

He storms past Hannibal like a vicious hurricane, heading outside and slamming the door behind him.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

He resolves that if Hannibal is not on this boat in the next five minutes, he will go look for him.

When his phone emits a little ding, signifying an incoming text message, it startles him. Will unlocks the phone with trembling fingers.

Meet me at the cove, as soon as you can. It's important.
- H

Will chews on his lip, unsure what to make of the message. They're supposed to be leaving, the sooner the better, and Hannibal knows this. What could be more important? The fear hiding inside Will's spine spreads into his chest, insidiously wrapping around his lungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal doesn't get to talk to Will, let alone see him, for the rest of the day. He can tell Will hasn't gone far, judging by the harsh sounds coming from the backyard where their boat is kept. He quickly figures out that Will is piling as much of their belongings onto *Mars* as possible, starting with food and necessities. With Mason Verger now knowing exactly where they live, they need to leave as soon as possible, because fighting off an increasing number of Verger's men each time will soon become unsustainable.

Hannibal spends the day glued to his armchair by the fire, a book in his hand. He is itching to go and help his beloved with stocking the boat, but judging by the rough way Will rummages through the house, kicking and tossing things around, combined with how he glares at Hannibal every time their eyes meet, Hannibal resolves that Will wants to be left alone.

He wants to say something to Will, to resume their conversation about loving words, but he hesitates. Will is very angry, and Hannibal knows it's best to let him cool off. Even if everything in his body is aching to fix their miscommunication.

Because now Hannibal realizes that's exactly what the problem is. *Miscommunication.*

For some reason, Will does not enjoy Hannibal's beautiful and regular love confessions. He's made it clear that he prefers Hannibal to express his affections directly, by those three simple words. Hannibal chafes at the idea, since his love for Will is something more magnificent and intricate than what the traditional, straightforward 'I love you' can convey.

But he realizes now that in order for Will to feel secure, and to feel as loved as he truly is, Hannibal needs to communicate in his preferred language, so to speak.

Hannibal sits in his armchair and stares into the fire, contemplating how he has run across such a tragic miscommunication when it feels like he knows Will, and Will knows him, inside and out.

After lunch, which consists of Hannibal having yesterday's leftovers and Will pointedly refusing to eat, Hannibal decides to take a walk into town for the last time. As he passes the jewelry store that seemed to be the initial catalyst to the big argument they had, he can't help but analyse what went wrong that day and how he can fix it.

If they are to leave tonight and say farewell to the place they've grown accustomed to calling home, Hannibal wants them to start the new chapter of their lives the right way. That includes resolving their conflicts and making sure none of the hurt and negativity follows them onboard.

A plan starts to form in Hannibal's head, and before he knows it, his feet have carried him inside the jewelry shop.

The sun has set, all their important belongings have been transferred onto the boat, and Will is antsy to depart. However, Hannibal is nowhere to be found.

He'd left the house hours ago, and Will hasn't seen him since then. He stands at the bow of the boat, impatiently drumming his fingers against the edge of the vessel. He texted Hannibal asking for his whereabouts fifteen minutes ago, and the man still hasn't replied.

Will doesn't want to acknowledge it, but he feels like something is wrong. Hannibal knows how important communication is and would make sure to message back in a timely manner, especially now that Verger's men are onto them.

He resolves that if Hannibal is not on this boat in the next five minutes, he will go look for him.

Even though Will is upset with Hannibal, the thought of him being in danger sends little jolts of fear through him. When his phone emits a little *ding*, signifying an incoming text message, it startles him. Will unlocks the phone with trembling fingers.

Meet me at the cove, as soon as you can. It's important.

- H

Will chews on his lip, unsure what to make of the message. They're supposed to be leaving, the sooner the better, and Hannibal knows this. What could be more important? The fear hiding inside Will's spine spreads into his chest, insidiously wrapping around his lungs.

Something must be wrong.

Distressing images flood Will's mind, of Hannibal captured and held by Verger's men. Hurt, bleeding, possibly on the verge of death. Used as bait to lure Will to them, too, because they know he wouldn't leave his beloved behind.

Will springs into action. As he quickly makes his way off the boat, through the house, and towards the car, he grabs his gun. After a second of deliberation, he takes a knife too.

Will knows exactly what ‘cove’ Hannibal is referring to. It’s a quiet and secluded spot several miles away from the nearest beach, unknown to most locals, hidden away in the crevices of the steep coastal bluff. He and Hannibal discovered it by accident on one of their days out sailing. They’ve likened the place to their own secret grotto.

Although the easiest way to find the cove is by boat, such a route would make his arrival way too obvious. And Will wants to stay hidden in order to have an element of surprise to his advantage.

He drives most of the way but ditches the car and continues the last half a mile on foot. Thick trees line the down-sloping ground descending to the bottom of the cove, which helps obscure Will’s movements and allow him to approach quietly and undetected.

As soon as Will can peek through the clearing in the woods, he sees a human body. Lifeless, covered in fresh blood, and skinned to reveal red flesh underneath. All senses immediately leave Will’s body, and his breath catches in his throat.

But then he sees Hannibal standing next to the corpse, alive and well, and instantly relaxes. Will exhales a heavy breath of relief and scans their surroundings for Mason’s men or other kinds of trouble.

There’s nothing. It seems that apart from the freshly-slaughtered body, they’re alone.

His eyes lock with Hannibal’s, and the older man smiles warmly at him.

“Thank you for coming to meet me, my love.”

Will nods, smiling back but still on guard. All of this could still be a set-up. He needs to be cautious.

“Who is this?” he asks, motioning towards the bloody carcass.

Now that his view is no longer obstructed by the trees, he takes a proper look at the corpse. The head is missing, bones are broken, and the limbs are not in their usual spots. Instead, the body parts have been skinned, stretched, and folded into a grotesque shape consisting of red-tinted muscles and tendons.

Propped on three swords, in front of Will, is an anatomical rendition of a heart, carved from human flesh.

Will blinks as he takes in Hannibal's latest creation. It's beautiful, like all of Hannibal's artworks. Will admires the intricate shaping and color of the all-too-human heart, although he doesn't understand why Hannibal made it. They need to flee from Mason, the sooner the better, but Hannibal's deemed it necessary to take time to go out and kill someone, then sculpt them into a heart.

Will spends a minute or two trying to make sense of this, without success. Then, finally, Hannibal begins to speak.

"The bluff is eroding, Will," he says, standing beside the heart. "Soon, all this will be lost to the sea."

Will frowns. "What?"

Hannibal walks towards him and caresses his cheek.

"Our life here is in danger," Hannibal sighs. "But I am not afraid."

Will's face twists, but Hannibal is quick to take his hand in comfort.

"I am not afraid of Mason Verger, or anyone else who tries to come after us for one simple reason. No matter what they try, my feelings for you will never erode, even after decades. I

will always be yours."

Hannibal smiles, then sinks down to one knee. "I love you, Will."

Will's mouth parts in an inaudible gasp. He watches with wide eyes as Hannibal reaches into his pocket to pull out two matching rings, gleaming in the sunlight.

Hannibal looks up at him with devotion.

"Will you marry me?"

They are words that Will has dreamed would come out of Hannibal's mouth, but had almost given up on their reality. Hearing them now, he feels tears well up in his eyes.

Through his tears, he lifts his gaze to the human heart standing on the swords behind Hannibal. He doesn't know who the person was, doesn't know what they did, but that doesn't matter. All that matters is that even though the Vergers are closing in on them, Hannibal made his love for Will a priority. He proclaimed his feelings through purchasing rings and sculpting a heart for Will.

All to ask Will to marry him, because he couldn't wait any longer.

Will feels his anger at Hannibal from the last few days evaporate instantly as his tears start to fall. He lets out a half-sob and half-laugh, falling to his own knees and throwing his arms around Hannibal.

"Of course I will," Will says, still half-laughing and half-sobbing. The only emotion running through him in happiness. "Of course I will, Hannibal. I love you too."

"Will, Will, my Will," Hannibal mumbles into his shoulder. Will can feel the older man's smile pressing against his neck.

The smile soon turns into a kiss. It's sweet and adoring, like the cherry on top of the already-perfect proposal. After several moments, Will breaks the kiss, but only so he can watch Hannibal pull back and slide the ring onto his finger.

It fits perfectly, and somehow that makes Will smile even wider than he already is. Hannibal knows his ring size, which really isn't that big of a deal considering how often they touch each other. Still, Hannibal knew it intuitively. He didn't have to ask. In light of their recent troubling lapse in communication, Will cherishes these small reminders that Hannibal knows him better than anyone else.

He stares at the new ring on his finger as his heart pounds quickly in his chest. He'd never worn rings before as he wasn't one for jewelry, and he never truly thought he would. The realization that Hannibal had crashed into his world and redefined his life, in the little ways and in the big ways, makes Will shed another tear in joy.

When his vision clears enough that he's able to see the details of the ring, Will gasps.

It's just the right width, not too thick or thin, and shining silver. There is a gold stripe running around the middle, adding uniqueness that Will loves.

"It's beautiful, Hannibal," Will hushes, unable to stop looking at it.

Hannibal laughs, a quiet, carefree sound that Will is only graced with on special occasions. It causes Will to look up from the ring, only to find Hannibal smiling, *glowing,* at him.

"There's more."

Will's eyes widen as Hannibal lifts up his own ring, the twin to Will's. Or, rather, not a twin.

Hannibal's ring is pure gold, with a ribbon of silver running around its middle. It's an inverse to Will's ring, a perfect complement. It's clear that the two different colours, gold and silver, represent the two of them. Each carrying a stripe of the other in the middle, like they carry a piece of each other in their hearts.

The meaning is not lost on Will, who laughs a bit in return. "Couldn't resist being poetic, could you?"

"My love, if you think that's poetic, you're really going to chastise me for this," Hannibal answers with a twinkle in his eye.

He slips the ring off Will's finger to reunite it with its match, then brings both the rings closer to Will's gaze. He turns them slightly, just enough so that Will can now see the inside of them. Will's heart picks up its pace as he sees elegant script lining the inside walls of both rings, and can't help his eyes from turning misty again as he reads the engraving. He has to squint to do so, since the script is so small.

He reads from Hannibal's ring first.

Any moment might be our last. Everything is more beautiful —

His eyes widen at the familiar words, and quickly switches his gaze to his own ring.

— because we're doomed. You'll never be lovelier than you are now.

Will recognises it as a quote from the Iliad, which has become their favourite book.

"Hannibal," Will whispers. "I love it. I love *you."*

He carefully takes the ring out of Hannibal's hand and gently slides it onto his beloved's finger, a perfect mirror to what Hannibal did for him moments ago. Then, unable to take

being apart from him any longer, even if just by a few inches, Will pulls Hannibal into another hug.

“I love you too, dear Will,” Hannibal says into his ear.

Will shudders as his body tries to comprehend the emotional rollercoaster it’s just been on, but he doesn’t mind. It had taken some time, but Hannibal understands what was bothering Will. He understands, and he *proposed with mirrored rings* to make sure Will also understands his feelings — his feelings of devotions, of commitment, of love.

“I’ll never take it off,” Will vows against Hannibal’s silky hair.

He feels Hannibal shake, and for a moment Will thinks he’s crying again.

“Well, I hope that’s not strictly true,” Hannibal replies. “The most common loss of wedding rings is due to contact with water, so I’ll expect you to take it off when showering, doing dishes, swimming — ”

Hannibal’s not crying. He’s *laughing*.

“Shut up, Hannibal.”

And then, Will is laughing too, and they’re clutching onto each other as laughter racks their bodies. Will thinks it may just be the happiest moment he’s ever experienced in his life.

After spending an extended amount of time in their cove holding each other, laughing, crying, and kissing, Will finally manages to drag Hannibal back to their house.

Their rings gleam in the setting sun as they walk to *Mars* with hands intertwined. Will's already packed everything, and they just need to get going. He's leaving their house behind, but Will doesn't feel as if he's leaving their home. How could he, when Hannibal *is* his home?

It's fully dark by the time they make it on board, and there is no sound apart from the waves eerily splashing against the hull of the boat. Hannibal lets go of Will's hand with a squeeze and heads straight down to the kitchen to prepare something to eat, as they both missed dinner in favour of more important matters. Will watches him disappear down the stairs with a small smile, then heads up to the captain's cabin. The plan is to keep sailing through the night, to get as far away from Mason's men as possible.

An odd chemical smell hits Will's nostrils as soon as he opens the cabin door and steps inside. He doesn't have time to wonder where it's coming from, however, as several shadowed figures surround him at once.

One of the men tries to grab him, but Will sends him back with a sharp punch to the jaw. Another two immediately pounce on him from behind. Will kicks, hits and bites the best he can, holding his ground for several minutes. He's pissed that Mason's men would dare come aboard their boat, but he's also not surprised. So he fights as best he can, using all his skill that's accumulated over the years —as well as some new tricks that Hannibal's taught him.

After he manages to slam one guy's head into a wall with a loud thud, he knows Hannibal would have been alerted by the sudden noise and would burst into the room at any second to aid him.

However, when Will hears the sound of furniture breaking downstairs, he realises with a jolt of fear that Hannibal is preoccupied with an ambush of his own. Will bares his teeth and prepares for yet another lunge, but suddenly there are too many attackers for him to handle alone.

He soon finds himself pinned to the floor, four men around him, holding down a limb each. He's fighting them with everything he has, snarling and whipping his head around to try and at least take a bite out of them if he can't use his limbs, but it's not enough.

When a damp cloth is pressed over Will’s mouth and nose, he finally recognises the peculiar smell as chloroform.

He continues to kick and thrash around uselessly as his limbs lose strength, and a moment later the world goes black.

Chapter End Notes

We apologize again for the delay, but hope this chapter makes up for it! The next chapter will be the last one :)

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> Will grits his teeth at the knowledge that their fighting on the boat wasn't enough. It wasn't either of their faults, but they had waited too long to leave, and split up when they reached the boat, giving Verger's men the opening they needed to incapacitate them.
>
> This time, they will fight together. These men won't know what hit them.

Chapter Notes

> We are planning one more chapter for this fic and then it will be finished. Thank you for sticking with us for this ride! ❤

"Make sure to tie them up well, Mr. Verger was specific about it."

"I got it, I got it."

"You better. Hurry up, the plane is waiting."

Will's consciousness comes back to him with those voices, and he blinks blearily as his foggy mind takes in his surroundings.

The first thing he notices is the thick, scratchy rope tied around his body, immobilizing his movement. His arms are restricted to his sides, hands behind his back, and legs bound together. He shifts a little, testing out the restraints, and scowls when they don't budge.

Then, he throws his gaze around the space he is in. It's dark, but there are soft rays of light coming from the general area of the voices. As Will's vision clears, he realizes that he is in the back of a van. A large van, with no windows save for those in the front.

He scans the small space, taking in extra rope and cargo boxes emblazoned with the Verger symbol. Finally, he turns his head to his right, and lets out a deep sigh of relief.

Hannibal is there, propped up against the same side of the van Will is leaning on. Initially, he almost missed the man as there was a box stuck between them. But Will knows that as long as he was in the general vicinity of Hannibal Lecter, he would always find him.

Hannibal is still out, but otherwise he seems unharmed. He does not have blood on his face, chest, or any other vital areas that Will can see, although he suspects that if he was able to see Hannibal's hands, they would be stained red. Just like Will's.

Will grits his teeth at the knowledge that their fighting on the boat wasn't enough. It wasn't either of their faults, but they had waited too long to leave, and split up when they reached the boat, giving Verger's men the opening they needed to incapacitate them.

This time, they will fight together. These men won't know what hit them.

With that comforting thought, Will nods in determination and inches over his legs to give Hannibal a soft kick to his feet.

"Hannibal," he hisses quietly. *"Hannibal."*

The older man's eyelids slowly flutter open. Much like Will, he takes a few moments to explore his surroundings and to realize that his arms and legs are bound. But with Will's urgent whispers catching his attention, he turns his head to look at his beloved. At his *fiancé*.

Understanding settles into Hannibal's eyes.

“Mason Verger,” he concludes, voice hoarse from all the fighting he did but nonetheless menacing.

Will nods hastily, already yanking his arms to loosen the restraints. Instead of doing the same, Hannibal focuses on inspecting Will with concern written all over his features.

“Are you hurt, darling?”

“No,” Will reassures him, rolling his shoulders and ankles to make sure his body is undamaged, for the most part. “Just a little sore. Are you?”

When a tiny sliver of light hits Hannibal’s face from just the right angle, Will can spot a bruise blooming on his jaw. The dull ache in his muscles tells him that there are probably similar-looking bruises littering his own body too.

“Nothing substantial.”

“Good,” Will sighs, relieved. “Now let’s get out of here.”

He immediately realizes that the quest is easier said than done. Will recalls vague memories of learning how to escape from zip ties and the like as part of his police training, but he’s never been in a situation where he had to escape from a kidnapper for real. It’s also difficult for Will to imagine that Verger’s men would be careless when tying them up and allow even the smallest chance for them to break free.

Hannibal pivots his body until his back is facing Will’s. “Can you get closer? Your back to my back. I’m going to try to untie you.”

Will does as instructed with a few uncomfortable scoots on the metal floor of the van. The moment his back touches Hannibal’s, he moves his hands as much as he can until he makes

contact with another pair.

Instead of untying Will's ropes right away, Hannibal grabs onto Will's hands, holding them tight. Will can't help but smile, despite the situation they're in.

"I thought you were going to untie me," he teases, but squeezes Hannibal's hands back.

"Allow me a brief moment, dearest," Hannibal replies. "I suddenly realized that perhaps I should have taken the Verger threat more seriously."

Will can think of many things to say in response to that, but all he does is sigh fondly and allow them a moment together, tied up in the back of Mason Verger's van.

"The threat *will* be serious if we don't get out of these ropes," Will says after a few seconds.

"We do need our limbs free to kill them," Hannibal muses, letting go of Will's hands and proceeding to work on untying his bonds.

Will grins, and soon enough the ropes around his arms loosen and fall away. He shrugs them off completely, then quickly removes the bonds on his legs.

Body now completely untethered, Will turns around to face Hannibal's back and reaches for him.

"You're slightly too good at this," he remarks as he unties the ropes. "Better than me."

"It's a skill I picked up when I was young," Hannibal responds, the bindings on his arms falling away. He leans down to untie the ones on his legs, and Will reaches over to help.

“I won’t say I’m glad for it,” Will muses, “but it’s useful in these situations.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal murmurs, pulling off the last of the ropes around his body.

Then, they are both free, facing each other and reaching out. Their lips meet in a soft kiss, full of gratitude to be alive together. Hannibal moves his hand to grab onto Will’s own, and Will smiles into the kiss as he feels their rings knock against each other.

Just then, the rhythmic bumping of the van driving on the gravel road ceases. The vehicle has stopped, and Will can hear the men in the front seat barking orders to each other and getting out.

“Together,” he whispers, turning his body to face the back door of the van.

Hannibal does the same. “Together.”

They both adjust their bodies into a crouch, ready to attack as soon as the doors open. Their hands are still linked between them.

The doors open to let in the bright light of the sun, and Will jumps.

He can’t see very well because his eyes have yet to adjust, but he feels the impact as his body slams into another and he tackles someone to the ground. There’s yelling all around them and Will can hear the click of gun safeties being turned off, so he wastes no time in slamming his fist into what he feels to be the face of the body below him, and wrenches the gun out of its hands.

He rolls off the man with lightning speed, hears the crack of gunshots, and raises the gun to blindly shoot at the hired muscle standing above him. Will isn’t afraid of shooting without really seeing or looking, since he’s positive that Hannibal is staying low on his other side. Even though his sight isn’t the best right now, he instinctively knows where Hannibal’s location is in relation to his own.

Thankfully, after Will empties the gun into the air, hearing pained cries and screams, his eyes have adjusted. He blinks, then opens his eyes to see four men laying on the ground in front of him, blood leaking out of bullet wounds. There is no movement from any of them, nor any sound.

A jolt of fear runs through him as he realizes that he can't hear anything else, and he snaps his head to the side, breath caught in his throat.

And then he lets it out in relief as he sees Hannibal getting to his feet, a spread of bodies on the ground around him and a gun in his own hand.

"Guns. So inelegant," Hannibal says, face scrunched up in disgust.

He drops the weapon to the ground then leans over to Will, hand outstretched. Will takes it, letting himself get pulled to his feet.

"But effective," he replies, grinning. "That was easy."

Hannibal sighs, and works on brushing the dirt off his clothes. "Suspiciously easy, I would say. There must be more men coming."

Will looks around and notices that they are what looks like a small private airfield. Yet, there is no airplane around them.

"We'll be ready for them," Will says with determination. "They must be getting the plane."

"A plane that flies straight to Mason Verger," Hannibal nods in thought. "Will, I think perhaps we should send him our regards."

Will grins, a hungry wolf baring its teeth.

“I think you’re right.”

It is relatively easy to subdue the remaining Verger forces, despite Hannibal’s distaste for guns. A few well-aimed squeezes of the trigger from behind the van catch the guards by surprise as they disembark the plane, and soon enough he and Will have taken care of all the external threats.

Once the shooting stops, they examine the corpses of the new men and Hannibal curls his lip.

“Cuban police,” he says, displeased. They are still wearing their uniforms, not even bothering to hide their true identities while engaging in bribery-based kidnapping of foreign fugitives.

“Mason bought them off,” Will sighs. “We can’t stay here anymore. If there was ever a doubt.”

Hannibal places a hand on his back in reassurance. “I do not care where we go, dear Will, as long as I’m with you.”

Will turns, and smiles softly at him. “Wherever you go, I go. Together.”

“Together,” Hannibal repeats, smiling. “But I think before we go, we ought to send a message to dear Mason.”

Will brushes his sweat-damp hair off his forehead and quirks an eyebrow.

“What do you have in mind?”

“I didn’t see the pilot leave the cockpit,” Hannibal observes.

“... which means he’s still on the plane,” Will deduces, but apart from that, he can’t tell what his beloved is planning.

“The poor man flew all this way to fetch Mason’s precious cargo,” Hannibal says slyly. “We can’t send him back empty-handed.”

Will huffs out a laugh. Even on the run, after slaughtering numerous people, Hannibal still doesn’t forgo his grand hospitality. However, Will can’t bring himself to complain about it.

They approach the cockpit slowly, almost certain that they will easily outnumber and overpower whoever is inside, like two predators cornering their prey.

Hannibal rips open the door of the little pilot’s cabin while Will points his gun, ready to fire if necessary. On the floor, crouching under the dashboard with lots of screens and buttons, they find a blonde man, no older than thirty. He isn’t wearing the Cuban police uniform and doesn’t appear to be armed, so Will guesses that as soon as he heard gunshots, he decided to duck down and wait it out, hoping to stay alive by hiding inside the plane.

“Do as we say and you’ll live,” Hannibal tells the pilot, voice non-threatening but cold. Will cocks the gun to drive his partner’s point home.

The man swallows and nods eagerly. Upon looking into his wide eyes, Will sees that he is scared and confused, but nonetheless ready to obey to save his life.

“You work for Mason Verger, correct?” he asks.

The pilot gives another nod, a little more hesitant this time. Even if he hasn’t had the privilege — or rather, the misfortune — of personally meeting Mason, he’s surely heard

about the atrocities the man has committed in his lifetime.

"You are going to fly this plane back to him, as per the initial instructions you've been given," Hannibal orders. "But before that, you are going to help us load the cargo in."

The man's eyebrows rise, and Will can tell he hasn't quite caught onto what it is that they want him to do. The realization doesn't hit him until Hannibal steps away from the cockpit door and motions for the pilot to come out.

"Please take care when loading all of these bodies onto the plane. The space inside is limited, but they all must fit," Hannibal continues.

Will swings the barrel of the gun lazily in the direction of the nearest body of a now-dead Cuban officer, motioning for the young man to get started. He swallows nervously, looking both terrified and disgusted, but complies anyway.

Will supposes that the job would be done quicker if he and Hannibal stocked the plane themselves, but it wouldn't be wise to let the pilot leave their sight. Besides, they are exhausted from all the fighting they've had to endure today. It seems fair enough to let the young man do all the work, and thereby earn their mercy. He didn't try to help Will and Hannibal's attackers, nor to hurt them himself, so both Will's conscience and dark urges agree on letting him live, this time.

He stands back, gun still ready just in case, and watches as the pilot drags the corpses of his dead associates onboard, one by one. They aren't in a rush. The man's hands shake as he picks up body after body, and it's obvious that he hasn't had to deal with so much fresh death before. After a moment, Hannibal instructs him to leave an empty space in the middle. Will wonders what his fiancé has in mind now, but decides to wait and see.

Once all of Mason's men have been transferred onto the plane, Hannibal searches through their pockets. He finds a pocket knife, and dips the hilt of it into a little pool of blood left over from their fight. On the unoccupied floor space of the plane, he writes a small message for Mason, using the blood of their enemies as ink:

You will not get so close again.

The note puts a smile on Will's face. No matter how hard Mason tries, no matter how many men he sends after them, they will always come out victorious.

Once finished, they usher the young man back into the cockpit and watch the plane take off. Will wonders if Mason is ever going to receive their little present, or if the pilot will land at the closest airport and report what he's witnessed to the police instead, too scared to face Mason after failing the mission. However, if he recognized Will and Hannibal's faces from the 'wanted' posters, he would know better than to not complete the delivery.

As the plane slowly turns into an imperceptible dot in the sky, Will reaches for Hannibal's hand. With the danger now over, adrenaline leaves his body and brings a wave of emotions in its wake. There is fear, anger, and vengefulness directed at Mason's attempt at harming them, as well as subsequent relief because they managed to escape, alive and for the most part uninjured. But beyond all, Will feels grateful to still be alive *with Hannibal.* He's certain that at his point, neither of them could survive separation.

Will sighs and stretches his aching muscles and joints, hoping to shake the tension out of them.

"I'd kill for a hot shower right now," he says, wincing at the soreness in his arms from throwing so many punches at Verger's men.

Hannibal gives him an amused glance, as if they haven't slayed enough people today already.

"I would endorse that. As long as you don't shower without me," he chuckles.

As a testament to his words, Hannibal's hold on Will's hand tightens, keeping him close. Will allows himself a small laugh too and leans on the older man. The desire to be close to his fiancé beats everything, even the urgent need to wash off the dried blood and grime on his body and then sleep for 20 hours. They almost died today at the hands of a cruel and sadistic enemy, and it's only due to their endurance and impeccable combat skills — as well as a

sizable amount of luck — that they're both still alive and free. And, more importantly, *together*.

So, although Hannibal's refusal to part from him even for the duration of a shower seems pedantic at first, Will knows it's because the man feels emotional, too. He almost lost Will, a possibility too painful to accept, and that's why he feels the need to compensate for it by not letting Will out of his sight and holding him close.

Fortunately for them both, there is nowhere in the world Will would rather be than in the warm and soothing embrace of Hannibal's arms.

"Where should we go now?" Will wonders aloud, pulling on some clean clothes after their shared shower in the boat's small washroom. "We can't stay here."

It makes Will's heart ache, but they really can't stay here any longer. They only returned to their house to fetch the *Mars,* which they'd already packed with their things. Will feared that Verger's goons had burned or otherwise destroyed everything that was theirs, including the boat and the house. So, when he saw their belongings intact, he was immensely relieved.

Will quickly sails the *Mars* away from their private dock and out into the open ocean. Far enough away that they would be unnoticeable by those on shore, but close enough to dock at a busy harbor in Havana. He stares at their seaside house as they sail away, watching it grow smaller and smaller in the distance and mourning the life he shared with Hannibal there.

Although Will is sad to be leaving their tropical home, he is also grateful to escape with his life, with his fiancé by his side.

"No, we can't," Hannibal agrees, dressing himself as well. "I believe it would be best if we returned to Italy."

Will glances at him, skeptical. “We’ve lived there before, wouldn’t Mason expect us to go back?”

And even if Mason doesn’t manage to find them again, the FBI might. After the bodies they left in Florence, Will is sure the Italian *polizia* are on a lookout for them.

“He might,” Hannibal allows. “But Italy is a big place, dear Will, with a lot of people. A lot of *tourists.”*

Will grins. “You intend for us to hide in plain sight?”

Hannibal turns to him and smiles. “I know of a very nice, quaint fishing village on an island in Italy that is often overrun with tourists. It would be easy to hide, and I think you’d like it.”

“I do like fishing,” Will chuckles. “Okay. We have to refuel the *Mars,* but after that we should be good to go.”

Will turns away to head to the deck, but Hannibal catches his hand and holds him back. Will looks over his shoulder, frowning when he sees Hannibal’s expression. His head is tilted, and his eyes are soft in pity.

“What?” Will asks, apprehensive.

“We can’t take the *Mars,* Will,” Hannibal murmurs. “Verger’s men saw it. They might have told Mason about it before we disposed of them.”

Will blinks.

“I know that,” he says. “I…”

He can’t believe it slipped his mind, but Hannibal’s right. They have to leave everything behind when they run, house and boat included. It’s for their own safety, and Will is willing to do anything if it means securing a future with Hannibal.

Still, he can’t help the sadness that swirls around his chest and envelops his heart.

“It’s for the best,” he mumbles. “But — ”

“I know, darling,” Hannibal says, wrapping his arms around Will in a hug. “You named it after our first tableau together. It’s special.”

“Very special,” Will agrees, sighing heavily.

He closes his eyes and he leans into Hannibal’s embrace, and the next time he sighs it’s one of acceptance.

“We’ll just have to get another boat,” Will settles.

Hannibal pulls back and smiles at him. “As you wish.”

Will nods. “We’ll have our things shipped over, and then take a plane?”

“Exactly what I was thinking,” Hannibal replies. “Oh, and Will?”

“Yeah?”

“We need to make a detour to a certain Italian chapel before we settle into our new island.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

They light the votive candles together and walk side by side to the altar. There is no officiant to give a formal blessing, but they do not need one. There is no God that can give their union more authority than they have already taken for themselves.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait everyone. We are back with another and final chapter of this fic and this series. This chapter goes out to everyone who loves wholesome and romantic Hannigram endings - you'll see why!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The church is unlike anything Will has ever seen before, yet also exactly what he expects when Hannibal suggests the place for their wedding.

He catches a glimpse of the outside during the day, when the sun is still shining and they are casing the place for easy access points for later. He hasn't really been around a lot of Catholic churches, since his dad frequented run-down Baptist ones in his childhood and he avoided the rest as an adult. The Normal Chapel is bigger than most other churches he's seen, and its architecture is impressive.

When they break into the church later that night, Will steps onto the mosaic stone floors and immediately gets overwhelmed by the abundance of decorative art. It's on the walls, on the floors, on the ceiling — it's absolutely beautiful.

He finds himself smiling, and thinks that Hannibal indeed chose the perfect spot for their nuptials.

They light the votive candles together and walk side by side to the altar. There is no officiant to give a formal blessing, but they do not need one. There is no God that can give their union

more authority than they have already taken for themselves.

Something flutters in Will's stomach when Hannibal slows to a stop, and turns to face him. Will stops as well, and realizes just where they are standing: underneath the domed ceiling with a painted Jesus, and on top of a skull, engraven in the mosaic floor.

It is the perfect place to exchange vows, and Will finds himself getting excited, quickly running over the words in his mind to make sure he does not forget a single syllable. He's nervous, because saying his emotions out loud is not something he's used to.

But it's something he's willing, even *eager,* to do. And judging by the shine in Hannibal's warm eyes, he feels the same way.

They stare at each other for a while, just basking in the moment. Will never thought he'd get married, and now he's doing so with a man he'd never thought he'd love. But he does. He loves him more than life itself, and now is his time to say so.

Hannibal reaches for his hands, and Will welcomes the gentle touch. Hannibal's hands are fine and soft but still calloused in the right places, and they fit in Will's own hands like they were made to be there. And maybe they were.

"Will," Hannibal speaks first, quietly, like he's afraid of disturbing the holy atmosphere that they've created together. "My love, you are the sole reason for my continued existence."

With those few words, Will's anxiety flies out of the *cappella* like a prayer, and his world narrows until only Hannibal, standing together with him in the candlelight of the most beautiful church he's ever seen, matters.

"You can doubt that stars are fire, you can doubt that the sun moves, and you can doubt the truth — but you can never doubt that I love you."

Will's heart swells at the breathtaking confession, and he smiles widely at its familiarity. "Shakespeare?"

Hannibal grins back at him, and continues.

"I live with no other thought, than to love and be loved by you," he says softly. "We love with a love that is more than love."

Will knows this one too, and his smile grows wider. "Poe."

Hannibal's eyes sparkle like twin diamonds.

"Whatever souls are made of, yours and mine are the same."

"Brontë. Are you just going to serenade me with the classics?" Will teases.

Hannibal chuckles, a joyful sound that Will can never get sick of if he heard it every day for the rest of his life, which he hopes he would.

"You deserve the best, darling," he proclaims. "For you give me everything, and I only want to give you the same."

Will frowns. "I don't know that one."

"It's mine," Hannibal replies. "What I feel for you surpasses my control and threatens my rationality. Will, there are not words that can describe the depths of my feelings for you. They are like a never-ending, bottomless sea that fills my entire body. Yet, I have no fear of drowning."

Will's breath catches then, hearing Hannibal's feelings in his own words enough to entrance him.

"I love you," Hannibal says simply. "That is all I can say, and all you need to hear."

"Yes," Will breathes. "Yes, Hannibal, I love you too."

It means everything to Will that Hannibal listened to him, and said the very words his heart was aching to hear. Of course, he had to wax poetic at first, but that was more for Will's amusement than Hannibal's own needs.

"I vow to be with you during the good times and the bad, for all the days of my life," Hannibal announces. "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine."

Despite Will's distaste for tradition, in that moment he admits that it can sometimes be nice.

Hannibal shifts his fingers to Will's left hand, and clutches at it ardently. They are already wearing their rings, as neither of them had any desire to remove them just to symbolically put them on again, but Hannibal still makes a point to draw attention to the band on Will's finger. He pushes their left hands together, and their twin rings click against each other. It's a small sound, almost inaudible, but Will's ears latch onto it like beautiful music.

Then Hannibal looks up at him, and Will knows it's his turn.

"Hannibal…" Will starts. "You have been many things to me. A friend, then an enemy. A colleague, then a lover. We are many things to each other, but…"

Will takes a deep breath, and the words he was so embarrassed to say leave his lips much easier than he expected.

“You’re everything,” Will says simply. “And I feel so lucky to have you, every morning that I wake up and every night that I fall asleep. You’re always there, and I can’t imagine my life without you.”

Hannibal’s looking at him with tears in his eyes, like hearing Will confess his feelings like this is more than he’s dreamed of. The sight fills Will with fondness, and he remembers how Hannibal told him exactly what he needed to hear, during his vows.

Will decides to do the same. After all, isn’t loving someone all about caring about them more than yourself?

“We are one and the same,” Will continues, his mind latching onto the Brontë quote Hannibal had said before. “If all else perished and you remained, I would continue to be. But if we are annihilated, then the universe would turn into a mighty stranger.”

Hannibal gasps softly, understanding of what Will’s doing washing over his face. Will smiles, and squeezes his hands.

“You are always, always on my mind,” Will whispers. “Not as a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.”

Tears are running down Hannibal’s cheeks now, and Will doesn’t have to reach up a hand to know that his own face has grown wet.

“I love you,” Will continues, pushing their rings together and making soft music again. “I vow to always be by your side, and kill anyone who stands in our way. In joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, I will always be with you.”

“Will,” Hannibal whispers.

Will smiles. “Are you going to kiss me, or what?”

Hannibal doesn’t need to be told twice, and leans forward to press their lips together in the most gentle, passionate, and loving embrace that Will’s ever experienced.

It’s wet from both their tears, but it's absolutely perfect. It’s perfect, because this is their wedding. This is the kiss that seals their vows, and binds them to each other, for eternity.

It feels like time stops in that moment, and Will knows it’s a moment he’s going to remember for the rest of his life.

When they pull apart, it’s only a few centimeters to allow them breath, and Will can still feel Hannibal’s smile against his own.

“Husbands,” Hannibal announces.

“Husbands,” Will agrees with a chuckle. “Now, can my husband take me to the honeymoon suite?”

“Oh, my dear,” Hannibal murmurs, nuzzling into Will’s neck. “I thought you’d never ask.”

The honeymoon suite is a beautiful and ornate apartment in the centre of Palermo they obtained just for this purpose. Will would stop and gawk at all the vintage furniture and painted ceilings, if he weren’t focused on one thing only. That one thing being his newlywed counterpart. His *husband*.

Will makes quick work of undressing while Hannibal draws the curtains close and lights several large candles he’s prepared specifically for this purpose. A warm glow settles into the bedroom, painting everything in romantic golden tones. The four-poster bed is large and luxurious-looking, and Will can feel the softness of the sheets in his mind before he even climbs in.

“Hannibal,” he calls softly, inviting his lover to join him in bed.

Hannibal doesn’t need to be asked twice, and soon, Will’s eager hands have pulled every piece of clothing off him, too. All that they’re wearing now is the pair of sparkling rings, and their boundless love for each other. When their bare bodies meet, it’s with a newfound flavour and passion; both of them committed to making their first night as a married couple unforgettable.

Will’s hands map out his husband’s broad chest and shoulders, touching everywhere they can. Craving the closeness and contact. Hannibal responds with similar ardour, endeavouring to kiss every inch of Will’s skin. Already, Will is struggling to decide which he wants more, for their joining to happen as soon as possible, or to draw it out and savour every moment. The only thing he knows is that he wants tonight to be special.

Hannibal’s lips start at Will’s mouth, giving him a sweet kiss, and then travel down to his neck, chest and stomach. Tasting. Marking. Claiming. Will arches into the touch, already hard and craving more. When Hannibal’s lips wrap around his cock next, it happens both too soon and not soon enough. Will feels like he can’t wait any longer, but at the same time doesn’t want this to end any time soon.

“Fuck, Hannibal,” he mouths in an inaudible sigh, legs falling open like an offering.

His body is Hannibal’s to take - has been for a while, but now it’s official -, much like Hannibal’s body is Will’s. The rings are a wonderful way to symbolize them belonging to each other, but somewhere in the back of Will’s mind, there is a voice telling him that there could be more. More ways to represent their commitment to each other, more ways to immortalize it on their bodies as a tangible reminder.

Will gasps, suddenly enlightened.

“Hannibal. The scars.”

His lover's eyes flick up to Will's, and he raises his head, letting Will's cock slip from his mouth. "What about them, beloved?"

Will looks down to his leg, where a line of raised tissue runs across his upper thigh. His eyes then find the identical scar on Hannibal's leg, a mirror image of his own. These two marks are a lasting reminder of their first night together, all those years ago in Hannibal's office. The night where they gave a piece of themselves to each other, in more than one sense. A tiny slice of meat from Hannibal's thigh was prepared to be consumed by Will, and the same part of Will was prepared to nourish Hannibal. An act of mutual consummation and consumption, forever being a part of each other's bodies.

The words fall from Will's lips like a prayer. "I want to renew them."

At that, Hannibal's eyes widen and darken, the depraved and self-indulgent beast awakening and taking its rightful place alongside the gentle and selfless lover. And for Will, who loves the monster and the man in Hannibal equally, it's imperative that both get to be part of this sacred night.

"I want to taste you, just like last time. Consume you. *Devour you*," Will whispers. "And I want you to do the same to me."

"Oh, darling…" Hannibal purrs in return, every syllable laden with hunger for the man who is now his official spouse. "You have no clue how many times I've dreamt of that day, of the feast we gave each other."

"Let's do it again, then. There is no time more perfect than now."

Hannibal groans in appreciation, eyes slipping closed in anticipation of renewing the marks they've gifted each other. Reluctantly, he leaves the bed to fetch a small but long black velvet box. He opens it to reveal an ornate dagger made of shining gold metal. Will has never seen it before, never witnessed Hannibal using it to slay their enemies. And maybe that is the whole point.

“My family heirloom,” Hannibal informs him softly. “Passed from one generation to the other via marriage. Now, it’s my turn to give it to you.”

Will nods reverently, amazed by how well their minds are attuned to each other. Of course, Hannibal prepared something like this as a wedding gift. Not a dazzling and decorative brooch, or some other jewelry that looks stunning but isn’t an accessory Will would naturally wear. No, Hannibal got him something meaningful. This blade is special; an ode to Will’s fierceness and a device for his bloodlust.

And Will cherishes it for the invaluable gift that it is. The dagger is too precious to be stained with the blood of undeserving pigs. What it should be used for is to facilitate the union of Will and Hannibal’s flesh and blood, aiding them in becoming one and the same.

“It’s beautiful,” Will murmurs, taking the dagger into his hand.

His fingers fit around the handle as if it was specifically made for him, and the way the candlelight bounces off the reflective blade is nothing short of mesmerizing. Hannibal settles back on the spacious bed, spreading his body in front of Will like an offering. They’re going to ruin the sheets with blood, but it won’t matter. This bed is the altar, and their bodies are both the sacrifice and the gods being appeased with it.

“Shall we?” Hannibal asks, inviting Will to come closer.

Will does, unable to tear his eyes off his husband’s calm but eager expression. Suddenly, Will is nervous again, just like before saying their vows. It’s not bad nervousness, just the pent-up anticipation of what’s to come making his body shake and shiver. Hannibal can read him like a book, so he leans forward and gently wraps his hand around Will’s, which is holding the blade.

“Together,” he tells Will.

Will nods, letting Hannibal’s strength and control seep into him through the junction where their hands are touching. He lets Hannibal’s sea of endless tranquility and certainty wash over

him, taking away the last remnants of anxiety. They are one now, and as such, their feelings are one too.

With their joint hands, they bring the dagger to Hannibal's thigh, right over the scar. Will inhales deeply, breathing in the love and commitment floating in the air around them. *He wants this.* He wants to mark Hannibal, and let himself be marked by Hannibal in return.

The first push comes from Hannibal himself, bringing the tip of the blade down to his skin, and then piercing through it. Small droplets of blood immediately well up from underneath the dagger. Never stopping the movement, he drags the blade across - and Will drags with him, with equal force now - causing the skin to part and more rivulets of red to appear. The wound isn't deep, but it doesn't need to be. The meaning of what they're doing is mostly symbolic.

But that doesn't mean it's any less magnificent.

When finished, Hannibal holds the blade to Will's lips, and Will licks it clean. His husband's blood spreads onto his tongue, becoming one with Will's body. Will's never been religious, but this feels like taking the Eucharist. Like he's taking the blood of his savior inside his body, and letting it sustain him.

Next, they repeat the same action on Will's leg, following the line of the old scar with the tip of the dagger. The cut stings, but not in an unpleasant way. Will embraces the slight pain, imagining it as an invisible thread, a *red* string of fate, binding him to Hannibal.

Forever.

Droplets of ruby-red blood roll off Will's thigh onto Hannibal's fingers, which he laps up with his tongue. Crimson hues stain his teeth and lips, reminding Will of the monster hiding just underneath Hannibal's skin. Will kisses him, chasing the taste of both the man and the beast.

Hannibal's body is hot to the touch, and Will feels like his insides are even hotter. They're like two burning stars, attracting each other until their scalding cores merge and explode in a

blinding burst of lust and love. Before he realizes, the dagger is discarded on the floor and Hannibal is on top of him, stretching him open with his fingers. He's wiped the blood off both their cuts, using it to slick the way between Will's legs. The sweet metallic smell spreads everywhere around them, making Will's arousal spike.

When Hannibal enters him, it's with the gentleness of newlyweds, but with the confidence of someone who knows him through and through. Will gasps and nips Hannibal's shoulders, leaving behind purple-tinged love bites. They've made love many times before, in different positions, places, and dynamics, but this time their choice of position is unanimous. Holding each other as close as possible, mouths interlocked, arms and legs tangled together.

Hannibal fills him up in the best possible way, not just with his cock but also with his undying devotion, adoration and commitment. With his monstrous strength, darkness and bloodlust too, since Will is now irreversibly married to the most dangerous man in the country - perhaps in the whole world. And Will gives it all to him in return; their love for each other is equal.

Pleasure rises and reigns over him, making him arch and moan every time Hannibal hits his prostate. Hannibal has Will's cock in his hand, stroking him in time with his thrusts. It feels so *good* that Will wishes it would last forever, but at the same time, he finds the magnitude of his desire almost overwhelming. Hannibal must be feeling the same way too, judging by how he's staring at Will in awe, as if Will was the most beautiful being in the world. Normally, Will would shy away from such a display of affection, but not today.

Today is a testament to the fact that Hannibal is never going to leave him for anybody else. He is Will's, and Will is his. Until the end of this life and into the next. With that thought warming his heart and Hannibal's name resting on his lips, Will reaches his peak and coats their stomachs with his release.

Hannibal bucks his hips a few more times, and then he is coming too, kissing Will's mouth deeply as he does. His hot cum remains inside Will even after he withdraws; another part of Hannibal that has now become one with Will's body. The older man dips a finger into the puddle of white on Will's stomach and transfers it to his mouth, completing their mutual consummation. All Will can do in his completely spent state is stare adoringly and smile.

They settle in to sleep like that, naked and covered in blood, in each other's arms, like two gods of love and death. They do not speak, because there are no words needed by either of

them that have not already been said.

Early tomorrow morning, they will have to pack their belongings and leave the city before the local *polizia* are alerted to the break-in at the Norman Chapel. But tonight, while they are still safe, Will wants to just lie in bed and enjoy the closeness of his husband.

He falls asleep to the steady beat of Hannibal's heart, and he dreams of golden rings and wedding vows.

"You were right about the number of tourists here," Will mutters.

Burano may be a small island near Venice, but it's so quaint and relaxing that tourists flock to it in droves, drawn by the colorful houses and old-fashioned customs.

Hannibal chuckles and runs a comforting thumb over the back of Will's hand that he's holding. His husband has always been rather people-shy, yet there is now a confidence about him in spite of the crowd. It's like Will knows he can use the multitude of people to disappear, or to hunt. That they can do so together.

"Hiding in plain sight," Hannibal muses as they make their way down the small, busy street. "Is it to your liking?"

He watches Will scan the area to take everything in, his beautiful blue eyes surveying the local vendors, the tourists, and the town's architecture. Hannibal picked this place as their new home for a multitude of reasons, and he hopes that Will agrees with his decision.

Will offers him a smile. "It's nice."

He keeps on looking around, but soon Hannibal notices that his eyes linger on the boats docked along the edges of the canals. Hannibal remembers Will's beloved *Mars* , which they were forced to leave behind.

"We'll get a new boat," he promises, squeezing his husband's hand with soft reassurance.

Their rings glimmer in the bright sunlight.

Will exhales beside him, a release of pain for all they had to leave behind in Cuba. Hannibal is grieving too, but he's come to understand that he can easily burn everything he owns to ashes if it means keeping Will beside him. Just like this.

"Okay," Will replies. "But maybe we could come up with a new name for it."

A small smile curves onto Hannibal's face as he makes eye contact with his beloved, and sees the familiar glint in his eyes. It's the gleam that makes Will who he is, that predatory gaze that landed upon Hannibal the first time they met and made him fall in love instantly.

Will named their last boat *Mars* after the tableau they created for Inspector Pazzi. His suggestion for a new name, by that same logic, implies a desire for something similar.

"Darling," Hannibal says, like a prayer. "Do you have something in mind?"

Will smiles at him, and his blue eyes look as clear as the sea surrounding them.

"Maybe," he responds. "We can talk about it later."

Hannibal smiles back, content with that promise. They are out of danger now, and have the luxury of taking their time. The rings on their fingers remind Hannibal of their safety, their shared commitment, and their love.

They continue walking down the pale stone street, taking in the little village that was their new home.

"Being back in Italy…" Will starts, "makes me think of our first time here. So much has changed since then."

Hannibal nods, understanding immediately. Will is inspired from their time here before, but wants to do things differently now.

"A new beginning in an old land," Hannibal murmurs.

Will hums in agreement. "I like it. Burano makes it easy for me to imagine our comfortable life together."

"We are always welcome to leave," Hannibal points out. "I want to show you the world, dear Will."

Will laughs lightly at this, but Hannibal is not joking in the slightest. He wants Will to have the freedom to do whatever his heart desires, and to experience the world in full. Hannibal wants to share everything with Will, whether that be his love, his joy, or everything the world could possibly offer.

"Travelling sounds wonderful," Will assures. "But no matter where we go, we'll need somewhere to return to. A safe haven, I guess, that nobody can trace back to us and our *hobbies."*

Happiness washes over Hannibal with those words, a crystal clear proclamation that Will intends to build a home with Hannibal. The only home they really need is in each other, but it will be nice to have a specific place to return to. Hannibal can readily admit that he is not immune to the occasional domestic daydream, with Will as his husband — and it seems that those daydreams are becoming reality.

“That’s perfect, darling,” Hannibal praises. “Luckily I have already picked out our *safe haven*, as you say.”

Will looks at him in question but Hannibal does not respond just yet; instead, he tightens his grip on his husband’s hand and leads him off the main street, down the twists and turns of little alleyways. Will follows, remaining silent through their trek. Warmth blooms in Hannibal’s chest at the tiny reminder of Will’s implicit and enduring trust in him.

Soon enough, Hannibal slows his pace and pulls them to a stop in front of a modest, yet well-sized, house tucked into the corner of a small street. Ivy beautifully curls up and over the front door, creating an organic archway over the pale wood. The house is three stories and each room is equipped with a window made of old-fashioned venetian glass. It’s pale blue in color, a color that caught Hannibal’s eye when he was house shopping because it closely resembled the shade of Will’s blue eyes.

“It’s ours if you want it,” Hannibal murmurs, quietly enough to allow Will to fully examine the house. “It is impossible for the FBI or Mason Verger to trace it back to us, and Burano is far enough away from Venice that it is highly unlikely a past acquaintance will run into us like in Havana — ”

Suddenly, Will removes his hand from Hannibal’s hold. Hannibal is stuck with a split-second of disappointment — Will doesn’t like the house after all — when Will throws his arms around him and squeezes him in a tight embrace.

“I love it,” Will says softly. “Thank you, Hannibal.”

Just like that, all of Hannibal’s anxieties evaporate and he brings his arms up to hold Will back, returning the warm hug. He closes his eyes, basking in this precious moment with his husband. He’s been doing that a lot lately.

Will pulls back from their embrace only so far as to look Hannibal in the eyes. The gaze they share is soft, and as warm as the sunshine pleasantly falling upon their skin.

“Do you know, Will,” Hannibal ventures with a twinkle in his eye, “why all the houses on this island are so brightly colored?”

It’s a fact that’s made Hannibal quite fond of Burano, ever since he learned of it while visiting here in his youth. His younger self tucked the information away for later, content to wait until he found someone to share it with. And now he has.

Will shakes his head. “No, why?”

Hannibal smiles. “It’s so that, when returning from a long day at sea, the fisherman can still find their homes in the dark of night.”

He leans forward and rests his forehead against Will’s, an incredibly intimate touch that he can now initiate with this man — his *husband* — without any hesitation.

Will breathes out a laugh, the sound like soft music to Hannibal’s ears.

“I don’t need bright paint to always find my way home to you,” he vows.

Hannibal’s heart pounds in his chest, and it feels as if he’s close to bursting from love. He finds it hard to believe that this moment is real, but Will’s touch gently guiding them apart and re-linking their hands is all the evidence he needs.

“Let’s go inside,” he says with a smile. “I want to see our new home.”

Hannibal follows Will inside like a planet orbiting the sun. When they cross the threshold, he squeezes Will’s hand gently, to share the joy they are both feeling. Hannibal’s index finger brushes against the ring Will is wearing, the little motion too precise to be accidental. A wordless reminder that Will is *his* — his beloved, his husband, the love of his life.

And nothing, not even an army of Verger’s men, can tear them apart.

Chapter End Notes

We want to say a huge thank you to everyone who has stuck with this trilogy and motivated us with their readership, kudos and comments. We appreciate every single one ❤❤

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